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VOL. LX No. 2

ADVENTURE

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October 23rd

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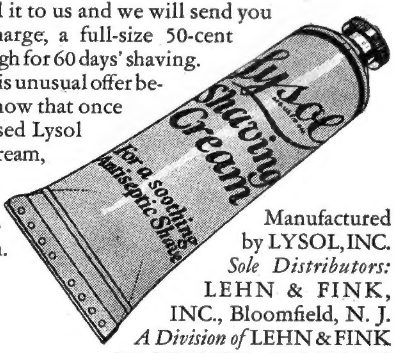
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Issue of October 23

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Beginning

A Modern Serial in a Medieval Setting

By F. R. Buckley

Who has written about Old Italy in
"State Paper," "A Cartel to Wm. Shakespeare," etc.

*The WAY of

PROLOGUE

In nomine Patris, Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

O BROTHER of another age, whose hands shall open this book (I am promised it shall be bound, with a lock on the covers, by the blind Brother Bartimæus) and whose eyes shall see these words, pray for the soul of Simeon, a friar of this order, who writes this, and whose bones, when it is read, will have lain for an hundred and fourscore years in the cloister quadrangle. I am sixty years of age now, but peaceful in mind, and with no more wounds to take; no more need to sleep out under the night-dews with men rotting about me; and so I think I shall compass another twenty years. And our abbot, in setting me this penance, promised that no eye but mine should fall upon these pages for two hundred years after my death; that is his ordinance against it, written in his own hand and sealed with the seal of the monastery, which shall have been seen heretofore. I explain it here because, having had naught else to do all his life but write, the abbot is too familiar with the art and hath become a vile calligraph; whereas I, having handled a sword to the exclusion of all pens up to twenty years agone, must yet take care over the formation of my character.

Also, it maketh my hand ache so that by the time I am finished there is no doubt I shall have little use in the fingers; which, nevertheless, is not the purport of the task. Had pain been the penance, the scourge would have been simpler, and would have wasted no vellum; but the abbot, desiring not the punishment of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness, hath rather set me this task to convince my mind; and, as he added, who knows, but the mind of some other weak mortal, two hundred years after me, dressed in another fashion, speaking another tongue, but subject to the same errors of judgment, the same passions of the flesh and the same remorses of the spirit, as myself.

For this is the case: After a life of war, and having found peace where alone there is peace, I returned (*mea culpa!*) to the ways of war; not once only but (*mea maxima culpa!*) two several times. Meseems that I rather deserved this heavy punishment which is to recount the whole story of my warrior days, and see the disgust thereof—for my first offense, when I threw the soup

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**This is an Off-the-Trail story. See contents page footnote.*

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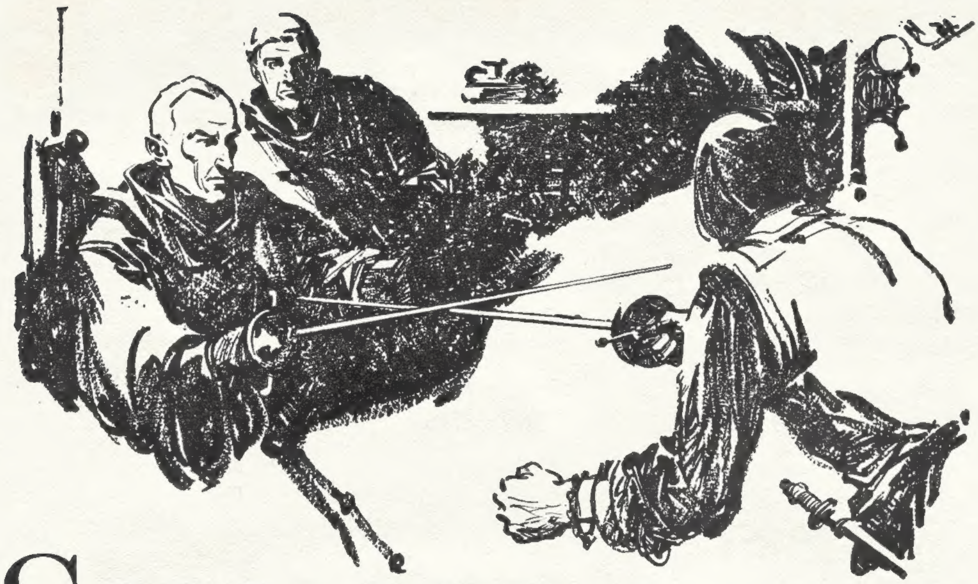


SINNERS

at Brother Ambrose for talking ignorantly about artillery; that was a selfish anger, of the sort which is indeed a little madness; whereas my second sin of violence was committed for a good end.

It was thus: I was down in the village with Pietro, the lay brother, buying fish; those in our pond having been bewitched and died, and there being no money to restock it; and on the way home again, Pietro, carrying one basket and I the other, it came to my mind that the landlord of the "Black Mule" was ill, and that it behooved me to see him. It is a mean inn—at least, it was a mean inn, brother of the future; for so mean it is now that doubtless by the time this mention of it sees the light, it will have altogether tumbled down; and the landlord (who recovered) will be dead; so will Pietro, whom I left standing out under the grape-arbor; so will the landlord's wife, who shouted from the back room that she was making his bed, but that he would be ready in a minute; and so will the young nobleman whom, turning to seat myself, I perceived to be lying drunk across the table of that most disgusting tavern. Beside him stood a servant who was exhorting him to rouse himself, as they had far to go before night; to which the master, his face on the wood, his hair in a puddle of wine and his hat in the mud of the floor, answered with grunts and drunken curses.

"My son," said I, "this is not meet."

Now he raised his face suddenly and stared at me with a look such as, in my youth, I have given to priests. He was a handsome boy; I judged him to be twenty-two or twenty three; not habituated to drinking either, meseemed. Flushed he was, of course, but his features were not degraded.

"It is not fitting for a man in velvet to show himself thus before humble brethren," says I sternly, having learned something about discipline in twenty years of soldiering, and more during my residence in this convent. "Bestir yourself, my son! If you have become drunk for pleasure, have your pleasure in private; if because you are sick, see a leech; if on account of some trouble or grief, see a priest."

"A priest!" says the young man, staggering to his feet and catching hold of the wine-bottle.

"Aye," I told him. "*Nolite inebriare vino, in quo est luxuria; sed implemini Spiritu.*"

"The devil take your Latin!" hiccoughs the drunkard.

"He—" I began, intending to say that he already had his fingers about the flask; but the young man would not let me finish.

Aye, he came swaying forth from behind the table, and nearly fell, and saved himself by catching hold of my habit with one hand while he shook the other fist in my face. He stank of chianti; thereby flying in the face of the Providence which ordains that those who must drink sour wine shall never be able to afford sufficient to befoul the air round about them; while rich men, who can pay for the privilege of smelling like wine-tuns, at least remind one of a good vintage.

"The devil fly away with you, too!" this mixture of the twain shouted into my face, while his servant crossed himself, and Pietro appeared in the doorway, setting down his baskets. "See a priest, quotha! See a maundering old fool in a woman's skirts! See a wet-nurse! If I am in trouble and grief, my trouble and grief are a man's trouble and grief. A man's, old woman, understandest thou?"

I signed to Pietro not to interfere, and detached the young man's hand from my robe. I am humble and fraternal, as the rule commands, but I dislike bad wine, especially when some one else hath drunk it.

"Priests are also men," I told him, remembering my previous faults of temper and the punishment therefor—bread, water and self-disgust.

He waved his hand at me and sneered.

"Old women!" says he thickly.

"Let us say, then," I urged, driving my fingernails into the palms of my hands and sinking my teeth into my lower lip until it bled, "that they—have been—men—once. And that—perhaps—certain of them—remember their former state."

He now laughed.

"Old women," he repeats, turning his back on me. And then, suddenly, he turned back and burst forth into a most terrible storming, as if it were the drink boiling in his stomach, and every bubble a curse. I will not repeat what he said; because to folks who, like myself, have heard men curse when their entrails were hanging out, his words would sound flat and not worth the reading; and to other people, they would—I trust—be hateful.

It appeared, however, that the cause of his state of mind, and therefore of his behavior, was a woman; whom with frightful imprecations such as the recruits use, he described in one breath as the most beautiful of God's works, and in the next as a viper, a strumpet, a cold-hearted she-devil and a Circe.

"Certes she hath turned you into a swine, my son," says I when he drew breath; not angrily, I protest; God wot, it will be seen later (if the bones of my hand will indeed hold out thereunto) that I, of all men, could not be angry with the poor lad; having passed my full time in the torture pit where he was writhing, and having now—*Dei gratia!*—passed from it. My purpose was to bring his raving to a stop by a dash of cold water, as it were; and stop he did.

"And it is to you," says he, more soberly than hitherto, "that I must come to be disenchanted?"

I could not say yea, because any other priest of age and of experience would have done—almost as well. Nor nay; and while I hesitated between the two, he went on, scornfully.

"I suppose you, too, were a man—once?" he sneered. "I suppose women's arms were around that neck, and their lips—"

"My son," I said, aware that blood was running down my chin, yet biting deeper yet, "cease these indecencies."

"Indecencies!" he roared, pointing me out to his servant. "See the man who is to cure the wounds of love, when talk of a kiss makes him blush and cry 'Shame!' Ho, ho, ho! Laugh at him, Michele! Old woman! Old woman! Old woman!"

This was not all that he said, but I can not write the rest, for that I did not hear it; being engaged in a wrestle with my soul, which struggle was hidden from the outer world by a red curtain that appeared (alas!) to hang before mine eyes. But by the Cross I swear that it was not until this curtain had entirely passed from my sight, and my heart descended, as it were, from the apple of my throat, that I spoke to the young man again; and then my words were mild; not dictated by vanity as they might seem, but by an earnest desire to save him from those well remembered serpents that were gnawing his heart. He himself was trying to drown them in another bottle of wine. The landlord's wife, when I recovered the clearness of my vision, was bringing the new bottle—she seemed to have refused it at first, for the young spark had drawn his sword, and the poor woman was as pale as a sheet. At the noise, her sick husband had risen, and was standing at the inner doorway in his shirt.

I paid him no attention, though it was deadly for him to leave his bed; it was his body only that was in peril, but the other's soul.

"Nevertheless," I said, "when—I was a man, I was even a better man than thou, my son; which is to say, a worse."

He opened his mouth to laugh again, and I feared his laughter; the red curtain, so to speak, was not too far rolled up.

"For instance," said I, "never did I draw sword on a woman."

"Ho! ho!" laughs the spark. "That I believe. Nor on any other soul, I wager!"

"On many other bodies," says I, committing the sin of hypocrisy by crossing myself and looking penitent when my heart was bounding with a fierce delight. "My son, listen to me. Thou art almost mad; I know; I have been almost mad. Soon, without aid, thou wilt be quite mad; I know; I have been quite mad. Thou wilt not seek aid where it is to be found because—because—I prithee, do not say it again; I must help thee in love, and not in anger. If I show thee that I am as well acquainted with the sword as thou, wilt thou believe that—of other things—I have some knowledge?"

He stared at me, and the landlord's wife screamed—as I remembered later; I noticed her not at the time; being too wrapped up in the intricate saving of this soul—he had been cursing God some time before; which, whether a man be burned for it or not, is surely fatal. Come, this will not be read until I am past judgment; I think it as unhealthy for a Chinese to curse his god, or a savage to blaspheme his wooden idol, as for a Christian to damn the saints. The thunderbolts that punish impiety come from within.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughs the young spark. "Give him your sword, Michele."

And I grabbed for the hilt greedily— Was it zeal for salvation that made me so eager; or was it rage? Who knows the shifts and counterfeitings of the mortal mind? The abbot asked me this, and queried my answer; now I query it myself, remembering that I took the guard position without demanding him further if he would confess to me if I overcame him.

When Pietro flung himself between us, moreover, I flung the poor wight across the room.

"Alack, alack!" I heard him moaning from under the table, "a friar fighting a duel! Alack!"

Then the young man lunged at me, and I disarmed him; so easily that he thought it an accident of his drunkenness, and said so; whereupon (and this was anger) I picked up a pitcher of water and flung it in his face.

"There's to sober thee, then!" I shouted, like a raging beast; and when he snatched up his blade, cursing and swearing like a maniac, took it in a false guard, twisted it clockwise (which needeth a rare wrist) and disarmed him again.

"And now—" says I, laying my own sword on the table as he stood staring at me; as I thought, ready to be convinced; but he was mad. Yes, he sprang on me with his bare hands and tried to strangle me, for that, as he said later to Brother Ambrose, I had humiliated him before clowns; him that had sat there hog-like with the wine the carters drink—

I tried to control him gently, but he was mad, and he drew a dagger to stab me; so that I struck him, to protect myself, across the face with the open hand; and he fell down upon the floor with blood running out of his nose; and according to the devil's rule, that blow I had struck against aggression made me lust to strike again; so that when he rose and leaped upon me, he met my clenched fist with his mouth, and had all his teeth smashed before I felt his knife in my shoulder.

Then I gripped him by both shoulders, and shook him till his head rolled, and flung him across the room; then I saw that he still had the knife and was struggling to rise, and I hammered his skull on the table until had God not been merciful to him and to me, he might have died; then, blind with fury, I took him by the middle and flung him through the window into the mud of the street, where he lay unconscious.

I had forgotten that the landlord needed spiritual comfort; in any case, who so unfit as I to give it? I had forgotten the reason, if indeed it had been the reason, that I had taken arms against the young man. I stalked out of the inn as if in full armor, passed him as I have passed the corpses of enemies, and marched along the windy road to the convent as if I had a company of the Guard behind me.

When the abbot came to my cell that afternoon I was sitting with blazing eyes, reveling in the memory of the past, especially of the days at Castle Impregnable, when the sun was so hot that the morions burned the backs of our necks, and Anita and I walked the ramparts together, cheering the cannoneers, caring not whether we were killed or not, so that one ball took both; we walked with our arms about each other, so that this might be, and for other reasons—

He looked at me long; said, "*Pax vobiscum,*" and went away; but it was not for hours, until dusk, that peace did begin to come; and then it returned to my soul with agonies like unto those of the surging back of blood into frozen fingers; but more severe; and I staggered as I went to find the abbot—with the dried blood still on my chin where my teeth had slashed my knuckles.

He was reading a book by candlelight; he closed it, and waited for me to speak; the which I could not. Then he laid the book aside, and for some time considered me; after which, slowly, he spoke.

"The Ser Paolo, whom you nearly killed this afternoon," says the abbot," recovered his senses, and desired a priest; he asked for you. It was for that I came to you this afternoon."

He shook his head gently.

"But I had to send Brother Ambrose in your stead. He has not returned; he is finding the task hard, I doubt not. It would have been easy for you."

Alas! One more added to the chances which, looking back over my life, I see I have had—and let go by! The opportunities for stepping upward, a little away from the earth and toward the angels, which I, like all other men, have fought for blindly, knowing not what I did, obeying only the urge born in humankind; and which gained, like most other men, I have despised and neglected!

The abbot came over quickly and laid his hand on my shoulder.

"It is time for vespers," he said. "Sit here, my son; and when I return we will talk together."

I was listening to the brethren singing, when Ambrose returned to make his report. I think he had been forbidden to speak to me, but he hath known something of war in his time, hath Ambrose, however foolish his notions about culverins, and so, when I asked, "Well?" he replied shortly, but replied.

"It *is* well," says he in a low voice. "He is much comforted, though it was thou he demanded."

"Aye."

Ambrose had turned to go, but for that I sounded sad, he turned again.

"The young man is the son of the overlord of this place," he said, "returning from the University; where he hath learned—er—it seemeth, other things than—er—dead languages. On thy account, Simeon, he hath promised to restock our fish-pond."

Seeing that I raised not my head from my hands, he hesitated still more, and added:

"So out of evil cometh good, brother! *Sursum corda!*"

Vespers were over, and he hastened away; kind man! I was in the same field of battle with him once, though I knew him not; we shall lie in the same grass-plot here, and I shall know him no more.

Strangely enough, the abbot, returning and setting me this penance, said the same thing—out of evil cometh good; he meant this book.

Ah, well! *Deo volente,* perhaps. Perhaps not.

We are but mortals; we do our deeds and pass away before the result is manifested; even of the least action, who has lived to see the end?

But good is eternal.

So is "perhaps"—

STELLA

CHAPTER I

OF MY FATHER

MY FAMILY was not noble; and with such a father as God had vouchsafed me, it was long ere I could bring myself to follow the custom prevailing among such as made their living by arms, and boast that in the past some lord or other had flung his left glove to us. Aye, years; during which time, discovering the preference of populations for being led to death by a noble, rather than to victory by one of themselves, I also discovered the total rottenness of the nobles aforesaid, especially in this matter of leadership. Not one in an hundred was fit to lead aught more warlike than an evil life; it was well known by every soldier in every army where I ever served that the duke, or the baron, or the count who commanded, received his orders from the captain who rode behind him—and that the captain, as often as not, was prompted by a sergeant;

yet would no army I have ever known have gone into action with a sergeant in command, or a captain either; if one had, it would have mutinied first, and run away afterward. For a chance of success in battle the men who have to do the fighting must see before them some one who hath inherited enough land to buy himself a gold-inlaid suit of armor withal; even if the body under the armor is crippled, twisted and enfeebled by debauchery until it can scarce raise an arm, and the brain above it shriveled by drink past knowing a charge from a deployment on the flank.

It is strange that while men can live their normal lives on a basis of truth, putting not their hands into the fire because it will burn them, eating because they will starve if they do not, and so on, yet when great demands are to be made upon them, in their hour of need, as for instance in battle, nothing will sustain them but lies. They seem to digest, as it were, and draw strength from them much more easily; perhaps because lies are made to be digested; whereas truth was out into the world before man was thought of.

Strange but true; I would I had known the truth of it at the time of which I write—*videlicet*, in mine eighteenth year, when I was preparing to leave my father's house and seek my fortune. Poverty was driving me forth; poverty was preventing the good old man from endowing my departure with aught but his advice; and, ironically, it was the poverty in which he had labored all his life that made even his advice worthless. The poor must live as they can; it is only the well-to-do that can spare time to study the principles of life, and arrange their affairs to the best advantage.

A mocking world it is now, brother of the future! And I doubt not that it will still be sneering; though there will always be certain gentle souls that remark it not. My father was one of these; and as I sat with him by the fire the night before my departure, I was another.

He had his thin white hands on his knees to conceal their trembling, and from time to time he would rise and snuff a candle to conceal his tears. He was at this time sixty-five years old; I was the only child of his second marriage; and save for me and a distant woman cousin that kept his house, he was alone in the world. My half-brothers and sisters were widely scattered, the Vitali being of roving blood; Paolo, a ship-master out of Genoa; Roberto, a professor at Padua; one sister wed in Florence, another in England; my mother had died of the plague.

"We have had good times with the fiddle, Francesco," says my father. "Aye, aye. It seems but yesterday thou first reached the high C without flatting it, and I remember thy delight. Wilt thou take it with thee, the violin?"

"I thought it might be broken on the journey, father! Messer Porsini has but pack animals to carry the cloth, and with the ropes encircling that soft stuff it would certes be crushed. Besides the weather is very bad."

" 'Tis true," says the old man; "besides, Messer Porsini will not wish thee to be playing the fiddle. Until thou art firmly established, mark me, Francesco, attend to naught but business. Be in the shop before it opens, stay there after it is closed; if extra work is asked of thee besides thy duties, do it without asking extra pay—nay, rather seek out extra work to do."

"Aye, father," says I.

"In this day," says he, clasping his hands around one shabby knee and rocking back in his chair, "youth does this no more, and has many arguments—to which I listen not—in favor of its course. I listen not because I have proven them wrong. It is now forty years that I have been in the counting-house of Signor Astraldi; during that time I have seen many, many young men come—and do as they thought best—and go. Whereas I am still there; and there I can remain until I die."

On starvation wages, he might have added, out of which, in forty years he had drawn three meager meals a day, and saved enough to bury himself; whereas if some of the young men were dead or destitute, many others were merchants in their own right. He had no idea of such an addendum, however; nor had I.

"It is in thee to do the same," he continued. "Nay, with thy youth, thy person, and the education thou hast had, to do much better. There is no reason why, in time, thou should not become Messer Porsini's partner; marry his daughter, perhaps, and in time be his successor and wear a gold chain and a furred gown as he doth. No reason at all!"

My heart sank at this. To be going to Rometia without a groat in my pocket, the clothes I stood up in, and a sword, was adventure; to be a burgess meseemed a kind of living death; and my father perceived this.

"My son," he said in a trembling voice, "I beseech you, be guided by me. Alone of my children thou hast listened to my advice, and hast profited, up to now, by my experience. I implore thee, give up these childish ideas of soldiering. A soldier is a fine fellow, he is brightly dressed, he weareth armor, he swaggers about with his sword trailing behind him; but he lives on the charity of God and the whim of his employer; be he sergeant, lieutenant, or captain, he hath never a home of his own, rarely a lawful wife, or children that know him for their father; and when his strength and good looks are gone (if he hath not been knocked on the head before then) he is flung out to die in an almshouse."

I sat silent.

"My son," the old man continued more earnestly still, "I was, as thou knowest, a musician; a life very comparable to that of a soldier, save that it is not so hazardous. Think you not I knew glory when I stood up before the duke's court and with that very violin thou seest me play now made them weep—not once but a dozen times? With my own compositions, moreover. Aye, aye. Yet when had I my belly filled, and my future secure? When had I peace, contentment—"

At this his voice trailed off, as it were, and he stared into the fire.

"Yet," says he, "if I could have published my works; if I had dared accept the offer of the Duke of Rometia to be master of his music; if—"

"Why did you not?" I asked.

"It was said the Duke of Rometia, a man of violent temper, that he would discharge any one that liked him not, without wages, without scruple, without mercy."

"But he must have liked your music," says I. "Had he not heard it here in Rome?"

My father put his face in his hands.

"Aye," says he, "but—nobles have whims; there was the risk; Rometia was far away; I had a wife and four small children; I dared not accept. Ah, me! Ah, me!"

Suddenly he braced himself again.

"But that is music—starvation and fear. Soldiering the same but worse."

It seemed to me the fault lay rather with the wife and the four small children than with the profession he had loved; and which, even to mine eyes, he loved still, and regretted like a dead child; but I said nothing.

"Whereas a merchant, buying a thing at one price, selling it for another," he went on, still staring into the fire," is ever safe. Ever safe. He eats, he drinks, he sleeps, he hath worship among his fellows, and at last he dies in his bed surrounded by the children he hath raised—I hope thou wilt leave thy sword at home, Francesco."

"Do you think," I asked, to avoid this last subject, "that the folk who pass their lives buying and selling and eating and drinking and raising children are happy, father?"

He ceased rocking himself to and fro and suddenly sat still.

"Francesco," he said after a pause, "the end of life is to keep alive; and after that to be as comfortable as may be. In my youth, as thou knowest, I was surfeited of passion, filled with glory, and starved of food. Now, the name of Tommaso Vitali means nothing to the world; and to the few that know me it signifies—a clerk. But my mind is at peace, and I am happy."

"But you are not," says I, "not—young, father."

"Nay," he says, staring at me queerly, "I am an old man, Francesco. Disappoint me not, my son, I do implore thee. Paolo would not listen to my words—he chose to stand on a wet deck, living on black bread and stockfish, surrounded by whales and great waves; he saith he is happy now, but what shall be his end? Roberto—Roberto might have been a scrivener here in Rome, and amassed wealth—wealth! He is honored at Padua; but when he can teach no more, what provision can he have laid up for his old age? They prey upon my mind; I fear for them; thou art the only one—"

I went over and put my arm around his shoulders, and he shook me off, and snuffed the candles for half a dozen minutes.

"It is for thy good I advise thee," he said in a shaking voice.

"And I will follow the advice," says I—fully intending to do so; seeing, as it were in a flash, all his care of me in my childhood; all the evenings by the fire when we had played sonatas together, and duets for violins that he had written in his stormy youth.

Nevertheless, when I rode out of Rome

toward Rometia with Messer Porsini's pack-train the next morning at dawn, I was wearing my sword.

CHAPTER II

OF MY APPRENTICESHIP

AT THAT time—in the days of Duke Alessandro I—Rometia was not what it has since become; a dull-lived city center of a rich and firmly founded state; had this been its character when I went to live there, you had been saved the reading, and I the writing, of yon harangue of my poor father's.

From the moment I passed under the great north gate — the guard was being changed, I well remember, and the arch glittered with halberds and rang with orders—the city went to my head like wine; every day, going about on my master's stuffy business, I saw sights which inflamed my blood and set my heart beating fast; every night, lying in my trundle-bed under the roof, I saw the braziers lighted on the town walls, and the watch in armor patrolling from blaze into darkness, and into the red flare again; the shop stood near the west gate, moreover, and often I would wake to hear the clatter of hoofs tearing over the cobblestones of our street, the jingle of accoutrements, and the yell of "Gate, gate! On the duke's service!" Then the hair would tingle on my arms, and I would get out of bed and take my sword from where it stood in the corner and take it to bed with me like a doll, grasping its hilt and imagining myself in command of that flying detachment until I went to sleep.

Yet I held myself in check, and was a most excellent shop-boy, losing not a minute on an errand, even when troops were drilling in the great square; for none other reason than to pleasure my father. God forbid that I should boast of virtue, who have been—thank God!—a great sinner; but if this narrative is to expose the pomps and vanities of the world in such fashion as to be understood by ordinary men, sure the narrator must stand forth neither as an angel nor as a monster of iniquity, but as an ordinary man himself; and well I know that if I protest not my good deeds, the most part of folk will think my evil deeds worse than the usual, because I confess them.

Alas! The spirit of my young days groweth on me apace. I begin to detest moral reflections—

What a city it was!

The palace stood in the center of it—quite new and hardly fortified at all; the which surprized me until I found the grim citadel on its hill, bristling with engines of war, and swarming with soldiery. It and the walls were the town's defenses; the palace was for diplomatic use alone; there were more musicians in it than arquebusiers. Alessandro was busy consolidating the duchy before extending its borders, as later he did; and he was the first, I think—in those parts, of course, the art being known from time immemorial—to deal with those who opposed him by means of wine and song, rather than warfare and sieges. He did this the better, of course, since the means of warfare were ostentatiously to his hand. Sometimes he mixed the twain, as when he invited the Count of the Two Rivers to a fête, and kept him enchanted while an army dismantled his castle; but whether in one method, or the other, to both, he was most utterly unscrupulous. A young man he was then; of whom the proverb said:

"Strong as an ox, clever as a monkey, handsome as a woman, and deadly as a snake."

To live under such a rule, for the more raffish inhabitants, was great pleasure; it was to me, as I have said; but to respectable and portly citizens like my master it was perpetual torment, as he said without ceasing at meal-times—one of my duties was to carve for him and his wife and his two daughters, which duty done I ate at the foot of the table.

"Such plotting, such disturbance, such treachery and everlasting anxiety," he would say with his mouth full, staring bulbously at me, whom he knew to admire the duke, "and for what? For vain military glory, the pomp of state; for the laying up of treasure which the moth shall corrupt, by other means than hard, honest work, which is the mode properly ordained for the laying up of treasure."

Mafalda, his elder daughter, would wink at me; and at once I would become alarmed. It was evident that she was disposed to shorten the time between my apprenticeship and my becoming a partner in the business by way of marrying the master's daughter; and the more plainly she showed it the more I disliked the prospect of promotion. She had a squint eye, God rest her.

"Where is the trade I had with Venice?" the old man would demand, brandishing a half-picked bone. "Gone! All my pleasant dealings at a reasonable profit, the sweet current of commerce that was running between here and there, stopped, dammed, and six of my mules drowned in it—confiscated, they were; thank God, unloaded!—and what does the duke expect to gain by the embargo? A mean, dirty village, as he says he doth, when he hath dozens already meaner and dirtier than that? Nay, it is excitement he seeks; it is sport he's after. He amuses himself; he intoxicates himself with these mad negotiations."

"He is young," says I one time, trying to stop this flood of indignation with the words that had soothed my father, "and loveth a thrill in his blood, sir."

"Thrill in his blood?" says the old man. "Think you I was never young, boy? Did I need a thrill in my blood? Or if I did, did I ever indulge myself with it? Nay, such thrills are only to be gained at the expense of others; and thank God I ever denied myself such immoral luxuries. I have learned and labored truly and decently; I learn and labor truly and decently still; and who would sacrifice another's interests to his own excitement, as thou didst thyself, Francesco, leaving that taffetas to crumple itself while thou stared at the cavalry going by, I count a villain. A villain! And now back to the shop."

That very afternoon, he sent me with a note to the shop of Matteo Uccello, on the Via Nuova.

I had been there a dozen times, always with a letter carefully sealed, and had never failed to find the old man in his place behind the counter; but this afternoon, he was not to be seen, and in his accustomed place sat a young fellow of something the same features, dressed in a gorgeous uniform, and rather more than three-quarters drunk. He had his feet on Matteo's desk, and a pen held between them, whereof he was trying to cut off the feather with his rapier. Just as I entered, he missed both the pens which I have no doubt he saw, and struck himself on the ankle; whereat he let his tilted chair fall over backward, and picked himself up off the floor swearing in a tremendous manner and in a voice that could have been heard all up and down the street. From the room above I heard a despairing groan in the tones of old Matteo.

"By the blood, bones and whiskers of the emperor of hell," roars the gallant, "I've cut my foot off. After thirteen battles and nine skirmishes without a scratch, may a hook-winged devil fly away with me to the smoking lake of Tartarus if I haven't wounded myself. What are you standing staring there for, fool?"

He was bigger than I, and older, and armed, but these considerations seemed to make my heart swell only the more.

"I'm looking for the blood of this shocking wound," says I; for there was none—the steel had hardly cut his boot; and in anger I added—

"Ass!"

He peered at me, drunken and incredulous.

"Eh?"

"Ass!" says I.

Upon which he thought of running me through (I was going to fling a great Roman cheese at him had he reached for his sword) thought better of it, laughed and finally held out his hand for my letter.

"Messenger-boy," he says contemptuously, "deliver thy message and begone."

"The message is to Signor Matteo Uccello," I told him.

"And I am the Lieutenant Pietro Uccello," he told me. "My father is not well. The drink hath overcome him; I mean the drink I have taken. A pretty welcome he hath given me, who ran away in rags and return in velvet, and in command of the escort of a count that treats with his duke on equal terms; but no matter; I have occupied his chair, and I will attend to his business. Give it here!"

And he snatched the letter, broke the seals and started to read it.

"By the thunder of God," says he, when at last he had gotten his eyes focussed on the paper, "what's this? 'I doubt what you say about the price of milk; it is not reasonable that it should not rise if the cow is ill.' Hah? 'Should not rise if the cow is ill?' "

He stared at me in vinous amazement.

"All these seals on a sick cow?" says he.

"Aye, and there was to be an answer," I told him. "If you will give it to me, I will go."

"Father!" howls the lieutenant. "Father!"

This time he could have been heard at the Citadel; and old Matteo, upstairs, groaned in shame.

"Father!" Pietro bellowed louder than

ever. "Father, some one doubteth what you say about the price of milk!"

Never heard I footsteps scurry so fast across a floor as did old Matteo's over our heads; as for the stairs, he must have leaped down them in one bound, and he nigh to ninety years of age; also his face, when he pushed open the shop door and came in, was more ghastly than any face I had then seen, though I have observed many very like it in expression since that time—on men just about to be hanged. His eyes were starting out of his head, his cheeks were as white as his beard, the corners of his mouth were twisting, and though his hands trembled violently, they were endued with astonishing strength. In his furred robe and all, he flung himself on his son, snatched the letter from him, struck him heavily in the face with his bony old fist, and stood in the middle of his shop quivering with fury, and spitting vituperations like a cat.

"Worthless — good - for - nothing!" he hissed, crushing the paper in his hand. "You hulking brute; you murdering—"

After this, no more words would come; and the fury, being bottled, seemed about to blow the old man up. He clutched his hand to his throat, and staggered back against the wall. I rushed forward to help him, but he waved me back, staring at me with eyes glittering with hate.

"Begone!" says he hoarsely.

It was evident that I had done wrong to give the letter to his son; though how so wrong as this, I could not divine; so I began to excuse myself.

"Begone!" screams the old devil, waving his arms in my face like a sorcerer.

"Begone! Your master shall hear of this! Your master shall hear of this! Begone!"

So I went home telling old Porsini that his answer would come later, and though he demanded what made me look so troubled, and what had kept me so long, I did not tell him.

I thought that Matteo Uccello would be there with his complaint soon enough, and that there was little use in putting my head in the lion's mouth before he roared for his food; I passed an afternoon uncomfortable enough, as it was.

Uccello did not come.

Nineteen o'clock was struck and we closed the shop; still he came not; I expected him all through supper, and had my food sit in my stomach like lead; but he did not appear. In fact, a sort of epilepsy had seized him just after I left his place, and he was then lying in his bed unconscious, with a doctor bleeding him most thoroughly, though nevertheless he was never able to move his right arm after.

Not knowing this, I expected him at any moment; and, rendered desperate by the suspense and the heaviness of my gobbled food, I decided to go walk about the city, returning after dark, when he should surely have said what he had to say, and Porsini have had time to recover from his first anger.

The dusk was falling; I ran up to my attic, got my sword and cloak, slipped out of the side door (holding my weapon up so that it should not show until I was out of sight of the house windows) and then, letting the point almost trail on the ground, I strolled toward the Great Square. My hat I had pulled down over my eyes as low as possible, so that my features should not be recognized by any of my master's acquaintance; I looked like a bravo, and I gloried in the stares of the strollers after me, while at the same time my stomach quaked at this departure from the way of life my father and old Porsini had with such passion recommended. So that my state of mind was most parlous.

A youth whose brain is full of the imagination of romantic adventure, the desire for the clash of steel and near escapes of death (it is the way with most youths) is in no danger, so long as his imagination and his desires are left free and unchecked; he groweth up, adventuring in his mind and using his hands for useful labor, and in time, seeing by the experiences of others how false were his gallant dreams, thinks of other things for the rest of his life and dies in a four-posted bed. But let his imaginings be soured by a sense of shame (as mine had been, thanks to Porsini's preachments and my father's words), or, as I have seen in other cases, by a fear that the imaginer hath not the body to carry out his desires, and forthwith the harmless dreamer shall become a most dangerous man; his ideas, prevented from their harmless running about the inside of his head, shall likely burst out into the world through his hands.

Think not that it is my intent to excuse myself of what I did that night; nay; what I did, I did because I could do naught else, and I have abode the consequences. But mark this: It was the fear of the anger of my master and old Uccello that sent me wandering forth with my sword that evening; and from what sprang their anger? From the circumstance that, while my master had been stamping on my love of adventure (and Uccello, doubtless, on the same in his dependents) the two of them had been busily plotting against the Duke Alessandro, to the benefit of Venice; not to gain money—they were rich, and could have made more by honest trading; just to warm their slow-running blood by the peril of their necks.

Ah, ah, ah! It was when I came to know this, that first I understood the meaning of that article of the commination: "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark."

There was a fête on in the palace, and, in accord with the duke's custom, a fête in the square before the palace as well; lanterns hung in the trees, fiddlers posted at all the four corners of the piazza; and about the fountain in the middle, some score of casks of wine with the heads knocked off and great pewter dippers chained to them for the use of the dancing crowd. It was not bad wine, either. A soldier who had sampled it freely left his girl and dragged me over to the fountain, there compelling me to drink a full mug and shout, "Long live the Duke Alessandro!" at the top of my lungs; after which he drank himself, and shouted the same thing even louder, joined by some dozen other loungers who were guzzling at the other butts. This, of course, was the duke's purpose; within the palace, he was treating with the count in whose train Pietro Uccello had arrived; he desired this count to know that his population adored him; so he was buying the loudest cheers he could, as cheaply as possible. Wherein he showed sound political sense; had he foolishly desired that the burgesses, the solid folk, should love him rather than the riffraff of the town, he would have paid thousands of ducats in remitted taxation, for a few feeble croaks.

"What count is this?" I inquired of the soldier, as steadily as I could, for the wine had flown straight to my head.

"God knoweth," says the fellow; and leered at me.

"It signifieth not; doubtless he is named after his lands, and if the duke is taking thus much trouble to pleasure him, doubtless he will have no name the day after tomorrow. Because he will have no lands, see'st thou? Ha ha!"

He put his great arm about my shoulders, and bellowed his foolish laughter into my face.

"Why, God's body, what a dignified little turkey-cock it is!" he roared suddenly, seeing that I did not bellow as drunkenly as he did (not because of mine own inclination, either; but from a feeling that to support soldiers in the piazza was no deed for my master's apprentice). "I've a good mind to duck thy head in a barrel!"

"It would be the worse for thee," says I, throwing him off and putting my hand on my sword-hilt; and, having no weapons, I think he agreed with me.

But he yelled for Michele, and Andrea, and Vicente, and some dozen of his friends with their red-faced women, and as they all stood around in a circle, arms about each other, staring at me, he made believe that I was a Puritan, come to put an end to sinful revelry; pointed out the thinness of my legs and the beardlessness of my face, and generally mocked me until I was scarlet with shame and running down with the sweat of fury. I reached for my sword (being elevated with drink); but the circle closed in on me, and one man shoved me with his brawny arm over to a girl who shrieked; and buffeted me back again; my hat fell off; the first soldier threw a dipperful of wine in my face and said something blasphemous about holy baptism; and then two great men-at-arms seized me by a wrist each and ran me backward to the edge of the crowd. Of these, one was fairly sober; and when I whipped out my rapier, insane with the rage of humiliation, he gripped my arms and held me still.

"Listen, my lad," says he. "Throw not thy life away. This is no place for the likes of thee; these be rough men and thou knowest not their ways. They laugh at thee now, but if thou goest back, they'll tear thee to pieces, sword and all. Thou'rt a clerk or the like, and we be men of war. Go thou to bed like thy masters, and leave us to ourselves."

With which he shoved me backward five yards and plunged back to the dancing; leaving me trembling on the edge of the crowd, under the grins of a dozen people—customers of our shop, some of them.

"Hey, Messer Bravo!" shouts out a girl, "What's cloth the ell?"

As for me, I stared at the lanterns, which now seemed of a sickly green; listened to the pestilential squawking of the music that had seemed so gay; and, as a roar of laughter burst forth at some other sally, turned and ran, nearer mad than I have ever been, down a dark street leading from the piazza toward the walls. I will confess there were hot tears in my eyes, which were shameful in a man of eighteen; but which became me better than the truly awful oaths I shouted to the fronts of the shuttered houses as I ran; though both tears and oaths, I now see, were natural in the circumstances.

Aye, I stumbled over a heap of refuse in the kennel, and got up all bruised and befouled, to run on again, still cursing and weeping, toward a dim wall-lantern that glimmered in the distance.

I knew not where I was; but the lantern was at the corner of two streets—the Via Nuova and another I had never visited, which was lined with respectable small houses. Not that I had time to notice this then; for as I rushed into the circle of yellow light, a man's voice shouted:

"Danger! Danger!"

And, halting, I perceived one, a mask across his eyes, running toward me with his sword drawn, what time two others, masked, cloaked and armed like himself, were struggling with a woman in the middle of the road.

"Hence, boy!" says the man who was advancing on me. "This is no business of thine. Begone!"

It was no business of mine, indeed; abductions under arms, like the rain and the sunshine, come from on high; and he who meddles with the affairs of the nobility will not long continue in the mercery business or in life at all. But for that scene in the piazza, doubtless old Porsini's exhortations would have guided me in that moment; though, as I have shown, but for old Porsini's exhortations, that scene in the piazza would never have come to pass.

Ah, irony!

However, being mad, I whipped out my sword; met the charging man with a most foolish thrust at the center of the breastplate; and felt my point slip upward over the steel and slide into something strangely soft that quivered. This was my first experience of how flesh feels, pierced, to the hand that holds the hilt; by strange chance, gliding off the armor, my blade had run mine adversary through the throat. His point, already at my ribs, came away from me and rang on the flagstones; I saw him raise his hands and clutch at the shining yellow line under his chin; he wrenched the sword out of his wound, turned away from me with a choking yell, ran fast toward his friends for half a dozen steps and fell flat on his face, writhing.

One of the other men, loosing the girl, was fumbling under his cloak for his weapon; scarce knowing what I did, I ran at him, slashed him across the face with the edge; then, as he screamed and spun about with his hands to his eyes, ran him through the back until my point grated on his breastplate. The girl, flung off by the third bravo (for such I thought them then), flung back her head and began to shriek. She had heard the armor clang dully, struck from behind; also the deathly gasp as the man fell off my blade on to his knees; and her shrieks were the unearthly screams of mad horror. Freed, she staggered across the road to a doorway and beat upon the door with her bare hands, shrieking all the time. I have no doubt this saved my life; for if the remaining man had come at me, now that the fire of my madness had been quenched with blood, certes he would have spitted me in two passes; but those unearthly screams, heard by his guilty soul, unnerved him; he did not finish drawing his sword, but took suddenly to his heels and fled.

He vanished from sight by the corner leading toward the great square, just as the watch, with blazing links, came tumbling in at the other end of the street; at sight of whom, overcome with fear at what I had done, I also girded up my loins and fled. They had seen me; and as I dashed down an alleyway to the left, an arquebus ball swished down the street behind me; the first ever I heard; and (strange, though natural) of all the thousands I have heard in my life, the only one I remember. I can hear it now—the distant boom of the gun, the hiss of the bullet through the air, and then the smash of glass as it broke a window beyond.

The alleyway led into a street I knew. Bedded citizens, awakened, were lighting candles and opening their windows; one of them saw me as I tore over the cobblestones with my cloak flying behind me and my sword still in my hand and raised his sleep-hoarsened voice in an alarm. I heard the watch yell in answer, and swarm into the mouth of the alleyway.

"*Ecco! Ecco!*" the citizen kept yelling, though he could see me no more; I had turned into the Via Nuova again, just by old Uccello's shop, and now I knew my way home, confused as I was; quickened my step, if possible; and dashed up, breathless and trembling, to the side door of the master's house. There was no light in any window—the family was abed; but, knowing I was abroad and not caring to descend and let me in when he could rate me just as well in the morning, the old man had left the door unbarred. I pushed it; it gave; I entered, barred it and stood listening. Scarce half a minute, and the watch went yelling by.

The danger now was that my master, who slept with his wife in the room toward the street, would awake and catch me as I crept up the pitch-dark stairs; but both of them, while upholding sobriety, were accustomed to fuddle themselves with mulled wine before going to rest, and they woke not. The house was deadly silent, save only for the snoring of Mafalda; and I gained my attic in safety; scabbarded (the first time I had thought of it) my still bloody sword; stood it, shuddering as I did so, in the corner from which I had taken it, still virgin, two hours before; and flung myself, panting and trembling, on my bed.

It was my intent, when I should have recovered myself a little, to rise and undress; but nature had its way over all my terror—and, what was stronger, over all my mental writhings of remorse and self-disgust—and before I knew it, I was fast asleep, fully clothed, and with blood still all over my right hand. I did not move; I did not dream; I knew nothing more until suddenly I awoke and saw the tiny window before me lighted with a flickering red. I was still blinking at this—I had not even wakened far enough to remember the events of the night—when memory of them was hurled into my mind by a hammering at the street door, and a bellow of:

"Open! In the name of the duke, open!"

My heart stopped beating; the palms of my hands grew cold; and as I clenched them, I felt the rasp of clotted gore between my fingers.

"Who calls?" came the quavering voice of old Porsini from below, as a shutter creaked back.

"A sergeant's file of the duke's guard, fat-belly," roars the same voice. "Now, wilt thou open, or shall we blow the lock off?"

"Nay, nay—but what seek ye?"

"Open and learn," says the sergeant, "and be quick about it."

The street, of course, was in an uproar; now every window was lighted—nay, doors were open, and most solid men in their nightgear were standing on the cold stones in the chill night air, gaping, while their wives screamed conjectures to each other from the bedroom sills. I could see and hear all from my window; over to which, moving as in a dream, I had staggered; against whose cold glass I was resting my icy brow.

Lined up in front of our house, with blazing torches, glittering black armor and arquebuses at the ready, were some dozen soldiers of the guard, and in front of them, a great burly sergeant with a long beard, who was hammering on the door with his sword hilt, swearing that he would have it down in another second, if it were not opened.

"My man has gone down with the key!" bawls the master's wife between her sobs. "Do naught rash, good soldiers, I implore you. It is a mistake—a mistake! He hath gone down, and the door will be open in an instant."

But he had not gone down; nay, as the door of my room was flung suddenly wide open, I saw that old Porsini had come up, though it was a second or so before I recognized him; so had he paled since last we met; so had he shrunken, not as to the flesh only, it seemed, but as to the very bones; he had aged fifty years, and even for a hundred and twenty would have been a poor specimen of man.

"Hide me, hide me, Francesco!" he gasped. "I have been a good master to thee; I will be a better; I will be a better. Curse you, you traitorous whelp, it was thou betrayed me; it can have been none other; I swear the letter to Uccello was innocent—"

"Blow in the lock!" roars the sergeant. "By the hairy hands of Judas Iscariot, I'll be mocked no longer."

At this Porsini gave a most pitiful moan, and tried to get under my bed; it was too low; so he stood in the corner whimpering and wringing his hands, his nose running and his knees shaking under him to that extent he could not stand; and at the very moment the arquebus boomed against his portal, he sat down on the floor, rolled over, and lay with his hands to his ears, howling like a calf. I remember standing staring at him and wondering what right he had to bawl; when I, for whom they had come, still held myself upright and was calm—not from bravery, however, as I now know; but because I was in such terror as to be nine-tenths dead.

It is most grotesque, in the light of knowledge I gained afterward, that I should have descended the stairs—as I now did, hearing the soldiery clanking and swearing up them—without the suspicion, even, in my mind that Porsini and Uccello were co-plotters, and that the note I had carried that day was a deadly document if read right; but no such suspicion had I.

"O may God condemn your old bag of bones to perdition," the sergeant was roaring as I came to the floor where the master's bedroom was. "It's a young man we seek, I tell you, woman; your son, likely."

"I have none—he died a babe," howls Signora Porsini.

"*Cospetto*, your apprentice, then! Where's he? Or did he die in the cradle?"

I came into sight, and he turned a steel-hard pair of blue eyes on me.

"Ah!" says the sergeant; and the man by his side swung the torch which was blackening the ceiling, almost into my face. I pushed it away, and heard Mafalda (she was there in her shift) scream out—

"O God, he hath blood on his hand!"

The sergeant combed his beard with his fingers, stared at me and moved his head.

"Hast thou been out tonight, boy?" he inquired, as two soldiers moved toward me. "Thou'rt fully dressed. In the streets, likely?"

"Yes," said I.

Now the two soldiers moved suddenly and seized me; one felt at my waist for a sword or dagger; they gripped me fast.

"Then I arrest thee, in the name of his Highness the Duke of Rometia," says the sergeant, as coolly as if he had been saying it was fine weather. "Lead the way with the link, Tommaso. The prisoner next. Fall in! Forward!"

As they marched me out, past the splintered door into the street full of gaping eyes and open mouths, I heard the sergeant upstairs roaring out good-nights to Mafalda and the dame, and advising them to be quicker with their bolts another time.

He caught up with us at the end of the street, where the escort had come to a halt; and the torch-bearer ahead asked him where they should take me.

"To the palace," says the sergeant, "by the back way. Yarely, now. Quick march!"

CHAPTER III

OF THE DUKE

IT WAS then the custom in the duke's service for an officer commanding an escort to march on the right flank abreast of the file containing the prisoner; and as we passed through the narrow streets leading to that side of the palace which was distant from the great square, the bearded sergeant, forbidden by discipline to talk unnecessarily to his men, began to chat with me in the friendliest manner. His beard was of a most peculiar color—it seemed pink; for, having been red when he was younger, it was now turning gray. Little dreaming that this odd mixture of hairs was one day to save my life, I noticed it without noticing it, as one might say; for what of my conscious mind was free from contemplation of my frightful plight, the which fascinated me as a snake doth a bird, was occupied in wondering at the sergeant's geniality.

Hitherto, I had experienced only folk whose province it was to obey the law; never had I mingled with the powers entrusted with the ordaining and enforcing thereof; and, seeing the horror which seized the commonalty when one of themselves became criminal, my thought had always been that the detestation shown by legislators and officers of the peace toward lawbreakers must be very much greater. If the mob before my master's shop had scorned me when they knew nothing of my fault save that it had not hurt them, surely (I had assumed) these men entrusted with the charge of what I had violated, must be filled with hatred for me.

"Hast been in the city long, young fellow?" asked the sergeant, however, in a friendly voice which I took—in my infatuation aforesaid—for an attempt to draw out information.

"No," says I.

"Well," the sergeant went on, "I liked it not when I first came—that was before his Highness started these politics; but since they've been forward, never saw I a place where I would sooner be stationed—Right wheel!—These fiestas, for instance—I suppose thou wast at the one last night, and made a fool of thyself—I am not without experience of them, and many's the noble I have seen put out a barrel of wine where the thirsty could get at it; but only one; not a dozen, as his Grace doth, and nobody of the household about to watch every drop going down a man's gullet a' grudge it to him. I've heard much of fountains playing wine, but a corporal from the garrison of San Angelo in Rome—Left wheel!—was telling me only the other day that that only happens once in ten years, and then the wine's ullage that would be vinegar if some use were not made of it."

We were now in a narrow alleyway, across which, at this instant, a man-at-arms dropped his halberd.

"Halt!" came his voice.

"Halt!" says the sergeant, and went forward.

"The password?"

He whispered it.

"Pass, escort," says the sentry, putting his halberd to the present; and we went on. Three times more we were stopped before we came to the low postern at the rear of the palace; once again the word had to be given—through a grille in the door—before we were admitted; and then, mounting the stairway after leaving the bulk of the escort in the guard-room, we found another armed man at every turn of the steps. Nor was this all; for, reaching at last a marble corridor whose walls were hung with velvet, and on whose floor was a carpet so thick that I stumbled, we were confronted by two men armed with arquebuses, and had to stay at the head of the stairs under guard of one, while the other went off down the corridor to announce us.

"Prisoner for his Highness in person, urgent," gasps the sergeant, rather out of breath after our climb, and running his finger round inside his gorget. "Pfoo! I must have the armorer loosen this, or I'll be hanged before my time." He was holding my elbow with his other hand, and may have felt me start at his words. From somewhere below, the continuing music of the fiesta—violins, violas, violas de gamba in slow measures—was welling up; in my exhaustion, I had as it were floated off on their harmonies; that grim word brought me back; and, feeling this, the sergeant tried to comfort me. "Nay, lad, take heart. Maybe it's not for thee, and in any case, thou must not judge hanging by the way men kick with their legs. I was almost hanged myself once, so I know whereof I speak; by ——'s hooks, I felt nothing at all after the first rasp of the rope, though they tell me I was wriggling like—"

The emissary returned.

"Prisoner forward to the door of the cabinet, and to enter," says he.

"Alone?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Very well, Forw—"

The other sentry stepped forward.

"The password, Sergeant," he said, bringing his arquebus to the ready; and the sergeant, with the muzzle of the accursed thing staring him in the face, smiled as he whispered it.

"Three weeks bread and water, had thou forgotten that, Filippo," he said jovially. "Thou'lt be a soldier yet, I see. Now—forward! Halt! Left face!"

As we stood before the door of the duke's cabinet, he ran his hands carefully over me again; and then scratched with his nails on the walnut. A soldier opened, behind whom stood an officer, the lieutenant of the guard; the sergeant saluted.

"The prisoner, sir."

"I take him in charge," says the lieutenant. "You may go."

The sergeant saluted again, shoved me forward, saluted again, and stepped back; the door closed behind me; and in another moment (after the lieutenant had scratched at an inner door) I stood in the presence of the Duke of Rometia; too terrified, and too near fainting, to see him at first.

"You may go, Lieutenant," I heard a voice say. "This is the man who killed the Count of Monterosso?"

"Yes, sire."

"Very good. Leave him here."

Killed the Count! Killed the Count of Monterosso! I was the man who had killed—the Count of Monterosso! I had slain a noble—likely the very man in whose honor this fiesta was being given; I was lost; I should die by torture in the public square most like—and these twain were as calm over the horror as merchants in a shop. Mine own horror was so deep that I swayed on my feet, and the emotion was not at mine own approaching end, but at the impiety I had committed in spitting a lord.

How droll that seems to me now!

"Stand up!" snapped a voice from beyond the mist which was before my eyes; they cleared at the command; and I had my first sight of Alessandro I, sitting in a great chair covered with leopard-skin, by a table on which papers lay in the light of a many-branched candlestick.

He had looked at me with his piercing black eyes while he spoke; now, seeing that I was recovered, he ignored me and continued speech with a lady who stood at the other side of the table. I saw that for costume he wore a sort of chamber-robe, of black velvet embroidered with gold; he had come away from the fiesta to attend to this business of mine, laid off his ceremonial clothes, and thrown on this loose thing; it was open in the front, and before I entered, had exposed his chest almost to the waist.

This had not mattered, before the lady; but when my low eyes were there to see, he pulled the robe together. This is a rule of princehood. The commons must never see that under rich velvet there is but flesh; for if they never see it, they will never know it, the fools.

"I tell you that in this, Anita, my word is law; and so good night."

"You do ill to make me plead my case before this fellow," blazed the lady; at which I looked at her; misliking, even in that strait, to be spoken of as a dog. She looked at me also; our eyes met; and (being dazed) I did not abase mine according to custom. Nor did she.

"There is no pleading to be done, and no case to be pleaded," says the duke coldly. "You are the more my subject, the more bound to do what I consider for the good of the State, for that you are my sister. Let me hear no more of this; I have other matters on hand. Good night."

She moved back as if to obey; and suddenly burst out.

"But he is hideous! It is the talk of the country, how that he liveth so evilly, that from time to time, wherever he may be, a devil seizes and casts him to the floor, where he writhes like a beast and slavers at the mouth."

"Are his lands hideous?" demanded Alessandro, leaning forward. "Do his castles live evilly? Do his villages slaver at the mouth? Thy talk is not to the point, sister. Good night!"

Still she hesitated.

"Get thee gone!" roared the duke, rising suddenly and thundering his hand on the table-top so that the candles spattered wax all about; and she went, proud still, but in secret fear. Our eyes met again as she passed me; for an instant only; then my gaze fastened, as if drawn by lodestone, on the face of the duke. If this was his way with his sister, what would be his fury with me?

When she had left the room, though, his gaze dropped; he seated himself in his chair as if nothing had happened; and when he spoke to me his voice was quite calm and gentle.

"What is thy name, youth?"

"F-Francesco Vitali, sire."

"A native of—?"

"Of Rome, sire."

"Of Rome. Thine occupation?"

"A m-mercer's apprentice."

"Sire!"

"S-sire!" I stammered, for suddenly his voice had snarled at me.

"Forget not that," says Alessandro, piercing me with his eyes. "A mercer's apprentice. So. Now, why didst thou kill the Count of Monterosso?"

I stood paralyzed before this terrible question.

"Answer me!" snapped the duke.

"Sire—sire," I stammered. "I knew not that—that it was the count."

He smiled, as if this amused him.

"That I believe. But why didst thou draw sword and kill—no matter whom? Art a ruffler, boy? Eh?"

"Nay, sire. I—"

"Tell, then! And the truth, mind! I misdoubt me I have been lied to on this enough."

He could not, I thought, do worse to me for accusing the count, than for killing him; so, all trembling, I began:

"The girl—"

"The girl?" demanded Alessandro, leaning forward. "What girl?"

"The girl they were abducting, sire—"

He stood up.

"This happened in the Via Aretino, did it not?"

"Alas, sire, I know not the name of the street."

"What became of the girl?"

"She was screaming, and beating on the door of a house in the street, when the watch—"

Alessandro picked up a small bell, and shook it. Instantly, the door of the anteroom was opened, and the soldier who had admitted us stood saluting with his eye on me.

"Send to the Via Aretino at once, and find me a wench that was waylaid in the streets tonight. Which house was it, fellow? Ah, thou didst not stay to note. On which side of the street?"

"To the right, sire, going from the lantern at the corner."

"Quickly!" says Alessandro; and the soldier withdrew.

"Yes, yes," says the duke to himself, turning his back on me. "Yes, yes. I had not provided for him well enough, eh, but he must go breaking into the homes of my people, must he?"

A strange tone he used for this; as if he were rehearsing a play; it was, so to say, indignant; yet he was smiling as he sat again in his chair.

"So you came on this little affair, and ran the sub-lieutenant of my guard through the throat, and my noble guest through the stomach after splitting his head open. Tell me how it happened."

I told him; he sat there smiling to himself as he listened; and at the end he laughed outright.

"A pretty evening's work to be done by accident," he said. "By ——, I hope I may not have to hang thee. A boy that hath accidents like this should make a good hanger of other folks."

He now closed his eyes, and raised the tips of his joined fingers to his lips; he appeared to think, quite forgetful of my presence, while I stood there with the death-sweat running off me. Once he opened his eyes, observed my condition, chuckled, and returned smiling to his mediation. Perhaps five minutes passed thus; then suddenly he reached for the golden bell and rang it sharply.

The door had already opened, and the lieutenant of the guard was standing there.

"They have returned with the girl, sire," says he.

"Good. Take her into the other anteroom, and when I ring twice, bring her here. Meantime, send me Lieutenant Uccello, of the count's train."

"Yes, sire."

"You may—nay, wait."

While the officer stood there motionless, Alessandro slowly surveyed me from head to foot; still smiling with his eyes, in a hidden way, and as at some secret jest.

"After half an hour, send me my chaplain," he ordered, after a long stare into my bloodless face. "The Lieutenant Uccello at once. Go!"

As soon as the door had closed, he began to walk up and down the chamber, slowly at first, and still with that mysterious smile; then more rapidly, and the smile died; faster still, and with a tightening of the lips that meant anger; and finally, with the pace of a tiger in a cage, a face moreover of wrath that was terrible to behold. Never saw I so complete a change in a man accomplish itself under my very eyes; within three minutes, from a wearily amused lord, the duke had metamorphosed himself to a devil controlling thunder and lightning.

It was in this state that Lieutenant Uccello found him when the door opened again; and my acquaintance of that afternoon—and evening, it appeared—was scarce in the room before the devil, the thunder and the lightning burst forth together at him.

"So, by the beautiful body of Christ, thou has lied to me, dog!" roared the duke, smiting the table with his fist and striding over to face Uccello. "Thou lying ——! Lie to *me!*"

The lieutenant, having told his story of that evening to cause my arrest, had entered ready to tell it again, maintaining to my very teeth that aught I said was the invention of desperate guilt; he had thought —and small blame to him—that the duke's fury against me would be such as to brook little argument before sentence. At this sudden turning of the tables, he lost, in a manner of speech, his wits; turned suddenly pale, and stood with dropped jaw and fixed eyes while Alessandro stormed at him.

"A peaceable walk in the cool of the evenine, quotha, because my banqueting hall was too hot! Attacked by a young ruffian out of sheer madness, ha? Thou lecher's jackal, I've a good mind to clap thee in a dungeon this instant; and had that sub-lieutenant of mine come back alive, I'd have had him out of a window with a rope on his neck ere now."

"Sire—sire—" stuttered Uccello.

"Silence!" roared the duke, striking him across the mouth with his hand so that he staggered; and then resuming his enraged pacing of the room.

"What I provided for him was not enough," snarls my lord at last, stopping before the wretched man who was leaning against the wall, "but he must creep forth under cover of darkness, to defile the homes of my people; and to cap that, when his just fate overtakes him, thou—thou—must come trying to swear away the life of the just avenger. By Gabriel his trumpet, it is too much!"

At this, to my amazement, Uccello, far from shrinking more in face of this righteous wrath, appeared to recover himself; he stood away from his support, and looked Alessandro in the eyes. Alas, alas! With naught of my opportunity for seeing behind the scenes, but with a little more knowledge of the true nature of man, he was wiser in that moment than I was to be for many heavy months. After the first shock of his reception, he could even maneuver on his own account.

"Sire," says he, coolly, "my master's deeds are no concern of mine; their rights or wrongs may be discussed between your Highness and his Grace, the father of the late count. All I can report to his Council of War is that my master was slain by a mercer's apprentice in no way related to—whatever woman—may have been in the case."

Alessandro said nothing for a moment; then he grunted, as if thinking; and recommenced his pacing of the room. Not angrily, now; he had laid off his rage, so soon as he perceived it would not avail him, as easily as he had put it on. Once or twice he glanced at Uccello sidewise under his lashes; and it seemed to mine astonished eyes that almost was he smiling again.

"You may return to your room—under arrest," says Alessandro at last, ringing his bell. "I shall require to see you again."

Uccello bowed as the lieutenant of the guard reappeared. He also had the trace of a smile in his eyes; it was my thought that fright must have unhinged his brain.

"Bring in the party from the other anteroom," says the duke, after he had repeated his instructions; and two minutes after Uccello had disappeared, a girl entered, pale, evidently so weak with fear that she had to be supported by a monk that walked behind her; but remarkably lovely; dusky soft hair she had, and great brown eyes; and she was dressed in the style becoming the daughter of a small shopkeeper.

Alessandro, turning from the examination of certain papers which he was withdrawing from a coffer at the far end of the room, wasted scarce a glance on her, but smiled at the priest.

"Ah, father," says he, hastening down the chamber, "you are welcome. I would have your advice; for the situation regarding the count has changed. It now appeareth that he was slain by this young man in the attempt to abduct the daughter of a citizen."

The friar shot out his under-lip and rolled his eyes.

"Ah!" says he. "And this young man did the killing of him?"

"Aye. Now, it hath occurred to me, that perchance I can gain two marks with one shot—the count is dead, whereby the obstinacy he exhibited is at an end; but also, meseems, I can make great play with the townspeople. How if, instead of hanging him, I excuse the count's death as the result of his evil morals; and give this young fellow the vacancy in my guard, for protecting of the holiness of the family?"

The friar nodded and stared at me.

"Is he the girl's affianced?"

"Nay; there's the rub; and this lieutenant of the count's is aware of that; he threatens me, moreover, if I buy him not off, to go expose the fact and loose the count's —— father on me. I had thought, if the plan liked thee, father, to marry the young man and the young woman here and now; then there will be a presumption that they were at least affianced before tonight."

At this, the girl rose bolt upright from the great chair in which the friar had disposed her, staring wildly from one to another of us. As for me, I started as if some one had pricked me with a dagger. Alessandro, however, looked at neither one of us, but only at the monk, biting his thumb-nail thoughtfully the while; and the monk, with no more regard for our presence than the duke, waddled over and took the seat from which the girl had risen.

"Much would have more, and so lost all," says the reverend father after a pause.

"Then I'd better hang the boy and have done with it?"

"Nay, nay. Not so fast. The plan is good, my son, if it can be carried out. But let us see. This lieutenant will know the marriage has been done tonight; he will not be deceived; the count's father will be at your throat just—"

"Oh, as to the lieutenant," says the duke eagerly, "fret not about him." He slapped the papers which he had withdrawn from the coffer, and which now he held in his hand. "He'll make no reports that are not approved by me. *Habeo capitem crinibus minimis.*"

The monk eyed the papers.

"Mm," says he, "then in that case, aye. A certain regard for morals would become thee just now, my son; there are rumors in the town about thy—"

"I had thought so," says Alessandro.

They stared at each other for a moment more, as though trying to imagine any further objections to their plan; then the friar rose, and pulled his breviary from his sleeve.

"Thy name, son?" he demanded of me.

"Francesco, father. But—"

"And thine, my child?"

The girl—and small wonder—was dumb with terror and amazement; she stared at the monk with her eyes wide, her hands clasping and unclasping each other wildly, saying nothing, until the duke broke in testily.

"Thy name, girl? What is thy name?"

"Stella."

"Sire!" He snarled at her in her woe, just as he had snarled at me.

"Sire," sobbed the girl. "Oh, sire—"

He turned his back on her, and began to open the bundle of papers.

"Marry them, father," he said over his shoulder; at which I found my voice.

"Your Highness!" I began to plead; whereat he swung round again with a face like a devil.

"Art thou married already?" he snapped.

"Nay, sire, but—"

"Wilt thou rather be hanged?"

I was dumb.

The monk laid his hand on my sleeve.

"Stand here," says he with his thumb in the prayer-book. "Thou, girl, here. Your Grace, neither of them has a ring."

Alessandro gave a testy exclamation at being interrupted, and pulled a great amethyst set in gold off his finger. He threw it, and it rolled on the carpet at my feet.

I picked it up; under the monk's instruction given curtly before he started a mechanical babble of Latin, I took the ice-cold and trembling hand of the brown-eyed girl in mine; and, as if in a dream—in a nightmare, too far removed from possibility to be comprehended—we were wed.

"Whom God hath joined let no man put asunder," I heard at last, "and since his Highness doth approve the match, ye can do without a blessing. It is finished, sire."

The duke, for the last time on that accursed evening, rang his golden bell; ordered the guard-lieutenant to bring Uccello again; and, awaiting his appearance, surveyed me and the girl—she had collapsed into the chair again, and was lying there, eyes closed, half-unconscious—with a smile.

"Well, my lad," says he, "for that thou'rt married, I must give thee a dower-present. I said that if thou were not hanged, thou'd make a good hanger of others. A sub-lieutenancy in my guard, then?"

Remembering his wrath at my earlier protest, I stood silent, with my heart like lead.

"Come, come," says the duke. "Speak! No need to serve me if thou'st not the taste. Plenty of better fellows than thou would give their eyes."

"Sire," says I, weakly, "I have an old father—"

"Ah," says the duke, "I had one myself. They are the ruin of many a young fellow. He desires thee to become worshipful in the cheese-vending—the mercery, is it?"

Uccello had just entered.

"The mercery, sire," says I.

"Ah. Cheese-vending was in my mind," says Alessandro, staring at Uccello and laying his hand on the bundle of papers before him, "because I was reading something on the subject a moment since—Lieutenant, with regard to the lamentable death of the count your master, I find that this poor young man is not only affianced, but wed to this unfortunate girl— If thou smilest insolently before me, dog, I'll have thy mouth cut dog-fashion back to thine ears!"

Uccello ceased to smile.

"Will your Highness permit a question?" says he very humbly, his eyes flickering from the girl to the priest, and then to the rich ring on the girl's finger.

Alessandro nodded, with a mocking smile in his eyes.

"Were not the pair married but now?"

"What has that to do with thee, fellow?"

"It is only that my duty," says Uccello, "doth force me to make report to—"

"Aye," said the duke, "and what wilt thou report to the uncle's grandma of thy late master, or whoever it may be?"

Uccello spread his hands.

"Unless, that is—unless I bribe thee?"

The lieutenant hesitated, and at last, looking at Alessandro, spread his hands again.

"Ah," said the duke, turning away from him. "Ah, me. Now, as to thy dower-gift, young man. Francesco Vitali, thou said was thy name, I think; and thou'rt unwilling to be sub-lieutenant in my guard. Because thy aged father, who had not the same light in his eye as thou hast, wisheth thee for his own purposes to be a mercer. Good. Then a mercer shalt thou be. Here is a bag of gold; but that is not to the point. After this night's disturbance, most like thy master will discharge thee from his service. Eh?"

Uccello, dismayed by this curt dismissal of his business, was gazing at the duke in surprize. Swinging about in his chair as I stammered that I thought it most like, Alessandro flashed a glance at him.

"Then we must prevent that," says he, breaking the seal about the packet of papers. "Yes, that must be prevented. Thy master's name is Porsini?"

"Yes, sire."

"Then to Master Porsini, in consideration of his retaining thee in his service, I will give a free pardon for having plotted against my person as head of this dukedom, for the advantage of the Republic of Venice. I will also confide to thee, young man, his pardon for *læsa majestas* in speaking of me, in this letter I have before me, as 'cheese,' and my levy on the citizenry, given under my seal and therefore to be respected, under the name of 'egg-money.' H'm. He also calls my army 'the farmers'—nay, that is not he; that is his complotter replying. H'm."

I opened my mouth to protest that Messer Porsini was the last man in the duchy to plot; up to that moment I really believed it; but, as I did so, mine eyes fell on the face of Uccello, white as a sheet and his mouth working as if he swallowed something over and over again; and of a sudden there flashed into my mind memory of the letter concerning the price of milk which I had carried to old Uccello that very afternoon; which this son had yelled aloud so innocently; and which had filled the old man with so terrible an emotion. Plot and complot—it was true! And I stood there, my jaw dropped, my hand flown up to my forehead at the shock, even my marriage forgotten in this greater dismay—knowledge that this very plight was caused by my venerable and respected master's lying to me; he whose duty it was, by solemn contract signed, to guide me in the art and mystery of life as well as mercery.

The duke, in the act of writing the pardon, saw me; laughed, rose with his pen in his hand, and patted me on the shoulder.

"Ah, ah," he chuckled. "Pity thou'lt not join my guard, Francesco. Innocents like thee make ever the best bravos at last. Ah, ah! Thou hast also an aged father who adviseth thee?"

"He doth not—" I began chokingly.

But the duke had gone airily away and was writing.

"Thy master is lucky to have thee," he said, folding up the paper and putting it into my hand. "Thy wedding-gift saves his neck. As for his complotter, whom even I had thought a most solid citizen, if inclined to protest poverty a thought too much when taxed—"

He shrugged his shoulders, and looked straight at Uccello.

"—if aught annoys me," ended Alessandro in a voice of steel, "most assuredly I will hang him at his own doorway. Speaking of thy bribe, Lieutenant, I will not give it. Make what report thou choosest."

Uccello, glaring, chalk-white and rigid, said no word.

"Dost thou understand?" said Allessandro, leaning forward and grinning into his face. "Then begone! Nay, begone, all of you; I am weary."

He stood, pulling his velvet and gold robe about him, stretched, and picked up the bag of gold from the table.

"Francesco hath no home for thee, my dear," says he, yawning, to—to my wife, in short, "therefore take this. Take it, I say! A man-at-arms shall take thee to thy father's house. Farewell, girl!"

He turned his back on her, and looked

after Uccello, who was sneaking toward the door of the cabinet.

"Bow to me, dog!" he commanded.

The trembling wretch obeyed.

"Farewell, Lieutenant," says Alessandro mockingly.

"Father, stay with me—I have things to discuss. As for thee, Francesco—mercery will not agree with thy countenance in this imperfect world. There will ever be a place in my guard. So—*a rivederci!*"

CHAPTER V

OF MY WIFE

BUT for a year and thirteen days thereafter, I remained in the mercery; rising, moreover—perhaps more quickly than aught other friendless young man in the history of that town—to be owner of a business, and a prosperous business to boot. A householder was I, moreover, with pots, pans and bed-linen belonging me, and eke a cat that in the daytime hopped from bale to bale of stuff, seeking sleep on my busy counter, and at night howled like the cat of any other respectable tradesman, under my bedroom window.

I gained these delightful chattels (represented unto me by old Porsini as the fruits of long labor, abstention from violence, caution with regard to marriage, attention to all advantages, and strict sobriety) in a week, by the killing of two men, a reckless wedding, neglect of the grip the duke had given me on Porsini himself, and by being drunken for the first time in my life.

As follows:

After I had left the palace, to go back to my attic bedroom, or my master's shop at all, was for the time beyond me; my stunned and exhausted brain was widely wakeful, my weary body restless; I turned away from the palace postern, and for hours walked fast and aimlessly about the streets, thinking, as I walked, in circles; from the scene in old Uccello's shop, to my fight with the three men, to my marriage—which, as the dawn came up, seemed ever more and more like a dream—to the plotting and hypocrisy of my master; and so back to old Uccello, and round and round again.

I saw the guard doubting the flares on the north wall, and was at the West Gate, staring, when that opened and let in the customary dozen of benighted travelers, shivering and dew-soaked after their vigil under the outer arch. The earliest yellow daylight found me in the great square again, mooning about like a dazed man amid the workers hastening to their day's toil, unbonneting as they scurried, first to the duke's chapel at one side of the piazza, and then to his palace on the other. It was a bright, clear morning, with a blaze in the sky that made my sleepless eyes ache, and a nip in the air that caused me to think longingly on my breakfast. Outside one of the little guard-houses that stood at each debouchment of a street on the palace square, a soldier in his jerkin was sitting in the sun, eating; the sight of his black bread and cheese made my mouth water so that there was a pain in my jaws.

In my wanderings, I had resolved to take no further service with that hypocrite my master; but at eighteen, the stomach doth dominate the reason; I had no money in my pockets to buy food withal; and ere I knew it, lo! my feet had led me to the Sign of the Shorn Sheep, and I was standing in the roadway watching Ercole, the widow's son who ran errands, a-brushing out the shop. Already, he bore an apprehensive look, having found the lock blown off the door; and now, as I advanced toward him in my still gory and disheveled state, he dropped his broom and fled to the interior, whither I followed him. Ah, there was a brave smell of cooking in the shop; from the midst of which rushed suddenly old Porsini, his mouth full, his hair not yet dressed, and his two arms waving like windmills.

"Avaunt!" he cried, while the heads of his wife and Mafalda peered after him out the shadows. "Hence, ungrateful murderer! Foul fellow—"

Here he choked on his food, and must chew and swallow, meanwhile pointing to the door.

"Sir—" I began.

"Sir me no sirs," says he, "I perceive that thou art freed; the good duke hath been hoodwinked, but I am not to be. Wretch, in the very room last night, did I not see evidence to hang thee high as Haman, a sword, to wit, all bloodied with the gore of a fellow-being? Of my mercy, I say naught of this; besides, thou'st brought enough shame on the shop already. But begone! Defile not my house with Cain's footsteps."

Now my blood began to rise; not very high, though, having no breakfast to pump it.

"It marvels me that thou couldst see anything yesternight, with that shuddering terror on thee," says I.

"Mock me not with my concern for thee," says the old man, staring at me like the author of all the Gospels, "but be more ashamed that fear shook these gray hairs for one so unworthy."

"It was on my account that thou trembled?" I gasped, taken aback by this audacity of lying.

"On whose besides? Thinkest thou, after what thou hast known of me, that any of my household born need tremble before the law? Nay, nay. But I waste words. Thou hast taken the sword, against the prayers and instructions of a second father; live by the sword, then; thou shalt perish by it; and so, begone!"

While I gaped at him, he turned his back on me, herded his women into the kitchen, and slammed the door; beyond it, I could still hear his voice raging righteousness, while his wife counseled moderation of his unselfish grief lest his appetite suffer.

There was no breakfast to be had here; I turned, my jaw still dropped, my hand still on the duke's pardon for that old reptile's iniquities, and saw Ercole gazing at me with sad admiration. While I had concealed mistakes of his in the business; he was as old as I, but thick in the head; moreover he had no father in trade, as I had, to throw custom in old Porsini's way; so he had needed protection.

"Then there is no breakfast for me here, Ercole," says I, smiling faintly to cover my embarrassment.

He did not smile in return, but stared merely; and moved not when I walked past him to the shop-door. As I set foot outside, however, he called to me:

"Francesco! Francesco! Whither—?"

I put my head back.

"Away," says I, "and—Ercole, hear me: when next the master rages concerning me, tell him that the duke said the mixing of egg, cheese and butter-selling with mercery was evil; and that I have a certain paper—"

The rear door of the shop opened, and I heard Porsini calling Ercole away; so I left the matter there, and strolled down the sunlit street. The folks who were opening their doors and windows stared and pointed, but I paid them no heed; well I knew, despite my innocence, that their interest in my exile had naught of breakfast in it; and breakfast, sauced with a disgust for all shopkeepers, filled my mind.

I WAS standing outside a baker's filling my nose with the scent of fresh bread, and fumbling in my empty purse, when Ercole caught up with me, all out of breath.

"Francesco!" he gasped. "Art—art thou really gone from the shop forever?"

"Aye."

"Then," says he, diving into his bosom and pulling forth a little leather bag, "then—here's for thee. Here, Francesco. Hast been kind—to me. Breakfast. I have been jealous—of thee—"

"Eh? Jealous?"

"Aye. Mafalda. But if thou art going—"

Never was I more taken to.

"I must begone," says he, thrusting the purse into my hand, "or what I've gained by thy going, I shall lose by being put to the door and so—seeing her—no more. Pfoo! God go with thee, Francesco."

He started away, but I gripped him by the arm.

"Stay. Is it possible? Dost thou really love that—?"

He flushed, perceiving from my tone that I thought little of his choice.

"Aye," says he, "and the more so that her father will never let me—I must begone, Francesco!"

"Softly," says I, "he will not put thee to the door, Ercole. It may even be that he will let thee wed his daughter."

Again my hand was on the duke's pardon.

Ercole meantime thought visibly that I was mad.

"Canst thou read?" I asked him, drawing out the paper.

"Alas, no," says he.

"All the better; then take this. And guard it well—especially from old Porsini."

"What is it?"

"It is thy license to wed Mafalda, if thou really choose; or to be a partner in the business, or—anything. Thou hast but to show it to the old man, and he'll deny thee nothing.

Now he thought I was madder still, though the great ducal seal on the sheet made play in his mind; he took off his bonnet to it; the which made me survey him with somewhat of contempt—that and his passion for Mafalda Porsini. She and my hunger together were making my stomach revolt.

"Use it or use it not, as it likes thee," I said then, with some irritation, "I go to breakfast. Farewell, Ercole."

"But—" says he, gaping at the document.

I went into the baker's doorway; and by the time I came forth again, he was gone.

"It will not do to eat it here, young man," says the baker, when in my hunger I had bought enough bread for six.

For a moment, I thought he too knew of my disgrace; but no, he pointed merely to my soiled garments and hands, the blood on which had blackened with exposure to the air, until it proclaimed not its nature.

"There is a pump down the street," says he, "and a wine-shop near it where housewives go not in the morning. Here they come, and would make a coil— Now, Madonna Elisabetta is crossing the street, and I implore thee, young sir, begone."

I found the pump and washed as well as I could (my mouth full of bread all the time) and then I found the wine-shop, where with cheer and courtesy they let me have use of a table and a chair; nay, when I ordered a whole bottle of wine they even gave me a slice of sausage for the love of God, and the wife came in and pitied me motherwise, saying naught. This was my first lesson in the judging of men by their souls rather than their trades; however, after half the bottle on my half-filled stomach, I was already much too merry to profit by it.

All I remembered of the circumstances which had so bowed me down and enraged me earlier in the day was the joke just played upon old Porsini, in the giving of his pardon to Ercole; I sat in that drinking-den chuckling as I ate the sausage, and the great world into which I was launched naked seemed a most safe and friendly place.

To its health, and to my success in it, I finished the bottle, paid, and staggered forth; the wine-seller would not let me sleep where I sat, so I was fain to find a grassy place in a side-street, and take the rest I so sorely needed, under a bush.

I awoke finding myself hungry again, and with an aching head; remembering to boot that the world, which now seemed grayer than evening was making it, had seemed quite otherwise after the wine.

I returned to the wine-shop; painted creation once more the color of the liquor; and so forward bravely on the drunkard's path for two days, at the end of which time, Ercole's money was all spent and I had straw on my shoon. I mean, I had been sitting with my feet in the kennel, forming a dam for the flowing water and a catch for the rubbish therein; the urchins in the streets knew the signs, and mocked me as I staggered about. My last whites had been spent for wine, but I was not happy in my drunkenness any more; I had had too little to eat, and had thought too much between-times; I felt weak and sick; a narrow street opened before me, with no urchins in it, and upon its causeway I sat me down, feet in the kennel again, and my head in my hands.

Two days passed—a little more; it was perhaps three hours past midday and the street was busy as ever it was with housewives going forth to buy cates for the evening meal, and returning laden; carts passing sometimes; folk going about their business. From near at hand came the *cling-cling-cling* of a hammer on an anvil; a dozen blows at a time, then a silence as the worker turned the metal over, then *cling-cling-cling-cling-cling* again; I did not look up to find the forge. My finger-nails pressed into my cheek-bones with a pleasant pain as with fixed eyes, I saw the feet of passers-by hurry along, pause as the citizens above them perceived me sitting there; then hasten forward again as they noted my condition. During the whole afternoon, I looked not high enough to see one face; nor did there come by any Samaritan willing to bend his busy back and seek mine.

Ah me! How well I remember! The cobbles had ceased to glisten in the sun; the stone on which I was seated was sending arrows of chill up my spine; a pair of horseman's boots went by, flapping about their wearer's ankles; puce hose with wooden shoes followed them; then came a red skirt, its hem pulled away from my side of the road; and after that, the furred hem of a russet dress; which hesitated before me, passed on; and after twenty heart-beats—or a dozen rings of the anvil down the street—came back.

I stared at the fur, and at the feet under it, they were neat little feet, in red slippers; and they moved not; moreover, their toes were my way; verily, they advanced toward me.

I looked up for the first time, and perceived a young girl, clad naturally in a dress whereof the rest matched the hem both in color and fur, who was carrying a basket of vegetables—a carrot lolled over the side, suspended by its green top, after the manner of carrots. It was plain that she would speak with me; and kindly, judging by the expression of her eyes; I therefore rose, caught my hat after two attempts and bowed to her.

"Messer—Francesco?" she asked me, hesitant.

Being mighty ill at ease, the more so since she knew my name, and being still drunk, I was gallant.

"F'cesco is 'ndeed m'name," says I, bowing again, "but how th' beau'ful lady 've 'nor to 'dress sh' know it, th' lady's humble servant can not 'magine."

She looked at me with great trouble in her eyes, and blushed.

"I had not thought thou wert of this kind," says she. "I—"

I put one hand on my hip—whence it slipped off and nearly unbalanced me—saying that I scarce remembered to have met her before; but that my state was of but a few days' age, and due to great family troubles.

"Ah!" says she, in a sweet voice of pity.

"But when," says I, "did we last meet, or first; and in any case, who art thou, madonna?"

At this she blushed more rosily than before, and occupied herself with tucking the carrot back in the basket.

"I am Stella Olivieri, daughter of the armorer in this street," she said slowly, "and—thy wife. It was in the duke's cabinet we met before."

I stared at her.

"My wife?" says I.

She looked anywhere but at me; then suddenly raised her eyes to meet mine full.

"Yes," says she, "hast thou forgotten that in the— It's but in name; but I am woe to see thee sitting—"

"Madonna," says I, waving this away with one hand, "certes I had not forgotten; even a nominal marriage for the duke's ends is not so easily drowned as that. But—"

"But what?" says she, looking pityingly at my rags, for rags they were by this time, and dirty besides.

"But in my remembrance," says I, taking off my hat again for no reason whatever, "it was a lady somewhat older, somewhat taller to boot; dressed in white; and with eyes of—of a different shape: more slanting, if I—"

There was a lounger on the other side of the street, a-staring at us and laughing; Stella turned and saw him. Never was here one who blushed and paled as quick as she; at his guffaw she flushed again.

"Doubtless you were drunken at that time too, sir," says she, moving away—but I moved after her—"but natheless, I am the girl in question; even she thou rescued from—those men—when thou wert more chivalrous than now thou art. Here is the very place—see the cross in the roadway else."

She pointed to one side of her, not looking where her finger led; and there, sure enough, by a dark stain on the cobbles, was a great cross chalked; this was where I had spitted the nobleman, and the cross was to warn carters, so that their wheels should not run over his high-born blood.

"I saw thou wert in trouble," she went on, "and—and thought to help thee. But—"

At this, seeing her striving to go while I detained her, the loiterer began to guffaw loudly; and I, fired by the example of my former deeds of valor, left the girl's arm and rushed across the roadway after him; upon which he fled, while I, catching my toe in some obstacle, fell flat and struck my head on the paving.

I must have stunned myself—there was a lump like a hen's egg on my forehead above the left eye when I awoke; in thundery weather (strange!) I feel it even now, to ache more than any of my dozen deeper and more recent wounds.

Seeing me stunned, and to lie unconscious in the street, Stella must have summoned help—of her father and his helper, most like, and had me picked up and carried into their house; whereof the forge was in the back yard; likewise she must have sent for a leech to bleed me—a wise step, in view of the muddy drink that clogged my blood.

For when I awoke, I was lying in a narrow white bed with a basin and a lighted candle on a stool by my side; and half a dozen stars in a blue-black sky, to be seen through the little square window by the bed-head.

And as I wondered over these matters, failing to connect them or the bandage I now felt about my upper arm, with my last clear memory—drinking in the wine-shop—a cool hand fell on my brow; the candle flickered and went out in the gust of some one's moving up to the bedside; and to the question of where I was, and who this might be, a soft voice answered from the door (she was going to fetch broth and a tinder-box for relighting of the candle):

"Thou'rt in the house of Olivieri the armorer, Messer Francesco. And this is Stella."

Joyous at my recovery, she laughed, and added—

"Thy wife!"

I remembered; and lay smiling as she clattered down the stairs—

(*To be continued*)

A ROYAL MEDLEY

by William Ashley Anderson

THE prime minister of a great nation once unexpectedly dropped in upon us at our little summer cottage at tea-time, accompanied by a friend. Afterward in the gathering dusk I walked over the hills to the great executive's private car; and on the way the friend found an opportunity to inform me in awesome tones that prime minister was a title of equal dignity to that of president, apparently with the honest intention of impressing me with the honor that had been done us.

I acknowledged the honor freely. I had indeed been pleased and impressed by the visit. But the friend's remark instantly called up a recollection of fourteen years ago when the Emperor of China kept me awake all night with his crying.

That was in the Wagon Lits Hotel, in Peking; and the little emperor has done well to keep his head upon his shoulders all these years, despite the godly dignity that attached to his title and the divine blood that is supposed to flow in his veins.

Since then I have met other royalties, informally and formally, and always as a simple citizen sociably inclined. They impressed me that they are rather wistful creatures whom no one would ever suspect of royalty without being told. I make one exception, an African, King of Wallo—and he sent a tremor through me with a single flash of the eye at the instant of his complete humiliation.

I have played football with the son of the Gaekwar of Baroda, the greatest ruler in India—a sallow little chap, a little overawed, and a little browbeaten by rough, irreverent, bantering Western playmates. At that time his father was trying to bribe him with the gift of a car to abstain from cigarets; but I'm afraid the great Gaekwar's power did not prevail.

As a young man in Mongolia I met one of the five Living Gods of Buddhism, of which the Dalai Lama at Lhasa ranks first, and the Hutukhtu, of Lama Miao, fourth. He rode in state with a barbaric escort from the plains, in a beautiful enclosed cart padded with silk; and his white mules were accoutered in harness of silver and large pieces of jade. When we were presented to him, his smooth, full face was shadowed with palpable anxiety, because he was being torn by at least four conflicting forces: Fear of Russia; fear of China; fear of Japan; and loyalty to Buddhism and Mongolia.

A very impressive queen called on me in the wilderness somewhere southeast of Lake Eyassi in what was then German East Africa. She came at nightfall with beating drums, and a bodyguard of powerful warriors, armed with shields and spears. Behind her walked two handmaids, and slaves carrying pots of wild honey and groundnuts as gifts for my askaris. This lady was a genuine queen and respected and obeyed as such. But she was rather fat, waddled as she walked, and her only garment was a single string of blue beads hanging about her creased hips. She was as coy in our interview as a playful spinster.

I will pass over the *sultanis* of various small districts who were allies and nuisances.

I will also pass over a chance word on shipboard with Lord Reading, since Viceroy of India, who repeated my obscure remark in Parliament, to my ineffable delight.

But I will not pass over a sultan and an emir, in Arabia, with both of whom I dined in honor of my friend, Mohammed Omar. It was a delicious feast of whole roast lamb, pilaus, savory sauces and strange sweets. Though we tore the meats with our hands and dipped into the sauces with our fingers, I have seldom been in more dignified or decorous company than that of these handsome, magnificently dressed Arabs. One, with the utmost *savoir faire*, spread his prayer mat beside me and went through the orthodox prostrations. The emir gaily suggested that the scene would make a good illustration for the *Illustrated London News*. Etiquette required, of course, that I remove my shoes before squatting beside the cloth that was spread upon the floor; and my most poignant recollection of that repast is of embarrassment upon finding a hole in the heel of my sock, and trying to keep it hidden from the eyes of my host and his guests.

I have in my possession a beautiful little gold watch presented to me as a memento of Armistice Day by an authentic princess of distinguished Continental royalty. There is no doubt that among those who know her she is one of the most beloved bearers of a title in Europe; yet at that time she was seriously considering abandoning her title, since it was an embarrassing impediment to travel.

The Emperor of Abyssina, who will bear the most ancient and dignified title in existence at this day—Negus Negusti, King of Kings, the Lion of Judah—this descendant of the great King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba I dandled in my arms, a chubby, warm-complexioned baby. I also had the honor of bowing at a formal presentation to the ruling Empress Zeoditou with all her resplendent court about her, standing upon magnificent oriental rugs, under a silken canopy. The handsome and alert young regent, Ras Taffari, the present actual ruler of Abyssinia, shook hands with me with the courteous affability that has marked him.

But the one who thrilled me was Ras Mikail, King of Wallo, father of the weak Lidj Yassou, whose toying with strange women and the enemy across the border had lost him a really great empire.

Since early morning victorious warriors had poured by in a steady stream. Over the hills toward Ankober the carrion birds of Africa were still gorging on the slain. No one will ever know the number that fell in that battle; but it is fair to estimate that between 125,000 and 200,000 warriors were engaged. Armed with everything from field-pieces to simitars they fought hand-to-hand for eleven hours, until the Christians triumphed over the Mohammedans. Fifty thousand of the conquerors marched by us in disciplined review, commanded by their ras, with trophies dragging from the pommels of their saddles, as they told with impassioned shrieks the tales of victory. Interminably the torrent poured by the empress's dais, and the great war-drums of the Gallas throbbed on the air like a rhythmic rumbling of approaching thunder.

At last came the defeated king who had fought so furiously and so near to success for a worthless son. He had been wounded in the head, and a white cloth was tied around it. Nevertheless, he walked on foot, somewhat wearily, chained to the wrist of a lesser ras. Arrayed in a simple toga, stained in action, he lost none of his natural dignity. His complexion was dark, with a crisp black beard; his features handsome, arrogant, domineering. Until he reached the Empress Zeoditou's throne, he did not know what fate was in store for him. There were certain things that might be said in extenuation of his bloody invasion. Who can tell what thoughts were in his head as he wearily approached the throne of his kinswoman?

His smoldering eye flashed once across the court, and I caught its gleam. The next instant he prostrated himself, defeated, broken, at the mercy of the little woman on the elevated chair before him. A peculiar awed silence hung for an instant over the vast assemblage, moved only by the distant throb of the war-drums. Zeoditou did not even deign a glance at the stricken chieftain. He rose to his feet dazedly, and was led away.

Shortly afterward I dashed off on horseback with M. Hallot, political director of the railroad that is Abyssinia's dread, to lunch with him in his little cottage on the edge of a cold crystal stream, bowered in roses.

That is why, though pleased, I was not particularly awed by the visit of the prime minister, a most estimable and admirable man.

Leonard H. Nason

author of

"Souvenirs" and "Chevrons"

presents another side of the World War

in a new

Complete Novelette

The STAG *at* EVE

IN A small room, plainly furnished with a bare table and two chairs, sat a man in the uniform of a lieutenant of United States Cavalry. His face was buried in his hands and his shoulders seemed bowed with a weight of care that was overwhelming. Some one knocked at the door and, receiving no response, knocked again. Still silence. The knob turned and a man thrust in his head. Seeing the officer, he opened the door to its fullest extent and stepped in.

"Get the —— out of here," said the officer, without raising his head.

"Sir," said the newcomer, who wore the stripes of a corporal, "the general said you might want to use the car, so he sent it over an' you can have it all day till five o'clock."

"I don't want his —— old car." The officer groaned aloud.

The corporal pulled off his gauntlets and, crossing the room, sat down at the table. The officer looked up and made a gesture of impatience.

"Git," said the officer, "don't bother me. I'm going to resign and go home. I never want to see the Army again."

He covered his face with his hands once more.

There was a bottle on the table and this the corporal stealthily grasped, raised, applied to his lips and after some time, quietly lowered it to the table again. The corporal was very careful, but it was impossible to escape making a slight sound, and the officer raised his head once more.

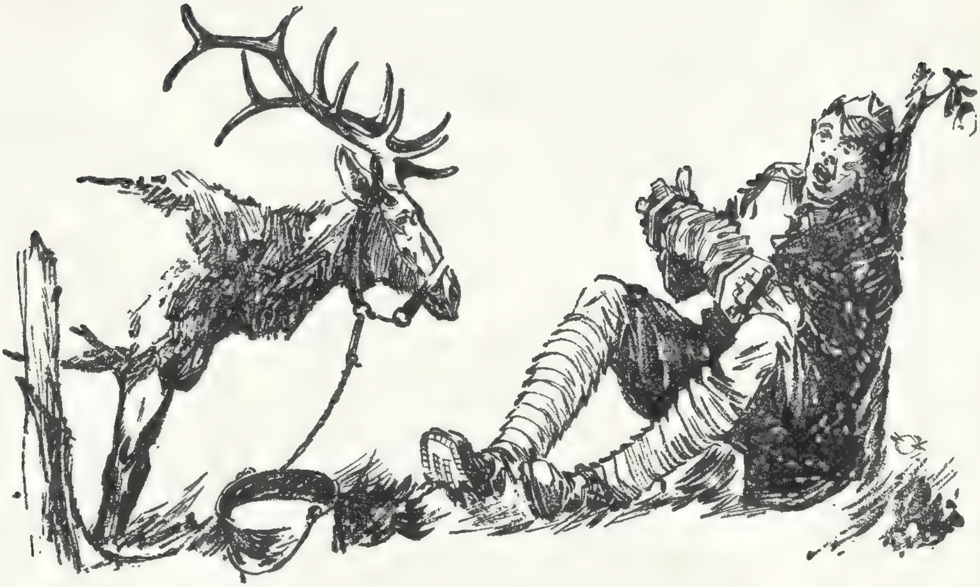
"Tell us about it," said the corporal, "git it off your chest. What's the matter? He tell yuh your boots wasn't shined?"

"I've just come back from headquarters," said the officer, after he had had recourse to the bottle himself for a second or two. "I go there with my old Salt Cod every morning, because in the conference he sometimes goes to sleep, and after it's over he asks me what it was about. He wasn't asleep this morning, though, —— his small old soul. What did I ever do to him that he should pick me out to be his aide?"

"Go on an' tell us the joke," said the corporal. "When you got the job you was tickled sick and stayed drunk for three days. I suppose he's got a old maid sister he wants yuh to entertain."

The officer groaned again.

"No," said he, "not that; that's simple. The Old Man got up and said that the generals of the French, Belgian and British contingents were coming to pay a call. Oh, curse the day I ever put on a Sam Brown belt! Corporal, when you and I were buck privates together in the old troop, why didn't you put a slug through my skull and end my misery? This is what a man gets for being ambitious."



"Don't let it worrit yuh," said the corporal. "You're all right, you'll be a general yourself some day."

"No," said the officer, "I'm going to resign. I'm done."

"I wouldn't," said the corporal. "Tell us about it. You just got to where a flock o' generals was comin' to call. Then what?"

"Well," said the officer, tearing a sigh from the very roots of his heart, "he went on to say that as the commanding officer of the American forces in Germany, he must uphold the honor and dignity and all the rest of that sour slum, and that when representatives of the Allied Armies came up on business it was up to him to provide entertainment that was unique. So then he asked for suggestions as to the best way to entertain these visiting generals."

"What'd they have to offer?" asked the corporal with interest.

"What do you think?"

"A keg party an' a whole flock of *fräuleins!*"

"Oh use your bean!" said the officer, waving his hand in disgust. "You're not entertaining a visiting delegation of corporals, these men are the high ranking officers of the British, French and Belgian forces."

"I bet they'd enjoy the keg just the same."

"We wander from the point," said the lieutenant.

He darted out his hand and seizing the bottle, kissed the mouth of it long and lovingly.

"Ha!" he continued, putting it down. "Well, there were divers suggestions and finally up and spoke old Salt Cod, the terror of the milishy. Oh man!"

The officer took another drink at the thought.

"Yes," said the corporal encouragingly.

"Well, Salt Cod, says he, 'I suggest that we stage a good rousing hunt, not a dishwater affair such as the British put on, chasing a bag of anise seed around, but a real hunt. I suggest we have a stag hunt.' Applause. Cheers. Laughter. 'But a man has to be a pretty good rider to follow a stag, doesn't he?' speaks up some one. 'There may be some infantry officers among them.' 'Oh, no,' said the Salt Cod. 'In the foreign service all branches know how to ride, it's too bad we can't follow their example in ours.'

"Well, then some of the infantry officers began to make personal remarks, and the Old Man put a stop to it. 'The suggestion is a good one,' he says, 'a splendid one. I'll send down to France for some stag hounds at once. General Collier, since the suggestion is yours, I leave the arrangements for the hunt with you and I'll look forward with considerable pleasure to the event.'

"So Salt Cod bows and they go on to the next question. Well, when the council was over, the old Cod beckons to his aide and the aide steps up and the Cod says, 'Lieutenant Masters, I want you to find a stag for this hunt. The other arrangements I will look after myself; all you need do is find the stag.' "

Here the officer groaned and clasped the bottle to his bosom again. "And so," said he, "the military service loses a good officer."

"I'd say you got it pretty soft," said the corporal. "No feed to look out for, no billetin' to do, no ball to git into shape. I wouldn't resign for that."

"A stag!" cried the officer. "Where the —— will I get a stag? I never saw one in my life!" He bowed his head in his hands again and the corporal seized the occasion to have another sip at the bottle.

"Well, I know where there's one," said the corporal. "Me and Osc was out walkin' one Sunday an' we seen it."

"Wild? A real stag? Was it wild? This is no drunken folly of yours now? You didn't see a cow and think it was a stag?" The officer seized the corporal's arm. "Man, if you've found me a way out of this mess I'll give you enough to keep you in beer till Germany pays her reparations."

"Sure it was alive an' wild, too. Anyway it was loose. It was up the hills there near that Schloss Lagerstein or whatever the name of it is. Me an' Osc seen it an' Osc told me what it was."

"Go get him!"

The corporal went to the door and then into the passage beyond. From the far end came a sound of rapping, intermingled with song.

"Some t'inks it fun to be Number Vun,
  Vot valks his post so fine.
But as for me I be Number T'ree,
  Vot rides der officers' line.
Oh, I giffs a look by der major's cook.
  She giffs to me a pie.
Oh, she waves her hand to beat der band
  As I goes riding by."

Here followed a sound of vigorous brushing.

"Hey, Osc," called the corporal, "the lootenant wants you."

The brushing stopped and a tall round-shouldered man appeared, one arm thrust into a boot to the elbow, and his right hand holding a brush. Osc was the officer's striker, dog-robber, or body servant, and had been cleaning the officer's boots. He claimed descent from those Northern Tribes, Letts or Finns or whatever they are, that have been so long oppressed, first by one neighbor, then by the other. Osc had thin hair and mild blue eyes. He was a little slow of thought, but made a perfect dog-robber. It might be noted that he wore the ribbon of the Distinguished Service Cross.

"Vot he vant?" asked Osc.

"Come an' see."

The two went back to the room and Osc saluted with the brush still in his hand.

"Osc," said the officer, "did you and Corporal Gehan see a stag around here?"

"Naw!" cried Osc, waving the arm on which was the boot, "dot vos a —— jughead from der supply troop vot eat der hay. Naw, it vos a jughead, I seen him. You bet I giff dot Mullens vun goot kick he let dot jughead come by our house an' eat der lieutenant's hay. Naw, I seen him, der black jughead, he comes by der gate in und I—"

"Wait, wait!" cried the officer, "listen! Here, you talk to him, corporal."

"Look, Osc," said the corporal. "You mind the time you an' me was out that Sunday an' we was follyin' the two *fräuleins* an' they ducked in by that big iron gate? An' while we was sittin' around wonderin' if they'd come out or if we'd go down to town again, out comes this big thing with horns on the other side o' the fence? Yuh mind? Wasn't that a stag?"

"Yaw," said Osc stolidly, "dot vos stag!"

The officer seized the bottle again and thrust it toward Osc. "Have a drink," said he. Osc put down his brush and complied. The corporal was heard to give a slight sigh, but at last Osc put the bottle down. The corporal idly picked it up and held it to the light, then sighing again, replaced it. It was empty.

"Tell me," continued the officer, "could you find this place again? Where is it, out on the Eschdorf road? Do you suppose the man that owns that stag would sell him to us?"

"Yaw," said Osc. "Der stag belongs to der old *jonkherr* vot liffs by der big brick house. I seen him before."

"Do you think he'd sell him to us?"

"Yaw."

"Oh man, what luck!" cried the officer.

"Here I was all cast down because I had to get a stag and I didn't think there was one this side of the Hamburg Zoo, and here we have one within three miles. Well, my part is done already. Bring on your generals. Listen, Osc, you don't think this man will have any objections, or hold out for any high price, or anything?"

"If he does—" said Osc, and grinning horribly, he made a slight twisting motion of his hand, a motion that made the others' blood run cold. In Osc's soul burned a deep and unquenchable hatred of all Germans, one of those racial hatreds that no Anglo-Saxon can understand, and that will forever prevent a lasting peace in Europe.

"No, no," said the officer with a slight shudder—he remembered how Osc had won the D.S.C.—"no rough stuff. We don't want to get into any row over this. I'd rather tell the Old Man I couldn't find him a stag. Well, this doesn't get us anywhere. Corporal, start up the car and let's go. Put on your blouse, Osc, and be our interpreter. We'll go have a look at the stag, and see if we can do some business with the owner."

They went out into the yard, where Osc and Corporal Gehan climbed to the front seat of the general's Cadillac, and the officer got inside. The motor roared, and they shot out into the street in a cloud of dust, chickens flying, mothers wildly clutching their children and herding them to safety, and soldiers leaping to attention. They did not need to see the star on the windshield to give a snappy salute. They knew that big Cadillac only too well.

As they left the town and went into the open country, the corporal turned about and called through the open glass, "Got a cigaret, Lootenant?" One was passed through to him and he slowed down the car while it was lighted. As he took up speed once more, Osc leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"You too —— fresh mit dot lieutenant," said Osc. "He put you by der mill some day. If I vos officer and you talk mit me so, I giff you good pound on der nose."

"Huh!" cried the corporal. "Just in private I talk like that. When the Old Man's around, 'May I speak to the lootenant?' 'Will the lootenant have the car wait?' 'Would the lootenant have another bottle o' beer?' But in private him an' me is buddies. We're outta the same troop. We was in headquarters troop o' the First Army an' one day I went to the mill for takin' a swing at the sergeant major, an' he went to officers' trainin' school at Saumur. Then after the armistice he got to be a lootenant, an' his old man bein' a big guy at home, he got made *addykong* to the general. An' bein' a good lad he gets me the job as general's chuffer. He's a good guy, Osc, you don't know what a good fellar you're workin' for."

"Yaw," said Osc, stolidly. "Vy he don't valk on der sidevalks once in a vhile? Effery night he comes home his boots mit mud a foot plastered all over deep."

The car hesitated at a crossroads and the two on the front seat heard a deep chuckle of pleasure as a lieutenant of Military Police saluted from a sidecar. The sidecar was out inspecting posts, and looking for men beating drill. Also said sidecar was overprone to take the numbers of Army autos, and turn them in to the provost marshal, much to the discomfiture of aides and chauffeurs who might be using the car on unofficial business. However, this time the use of the car was authorized, and the lieutenant laughed again as looking back, he saw the lieutenant draw out book and pencil and note down the hour and number of the car. The officer in the sidecar hated the general's aide because he was the general's aide, and also because of a personal matter connected with the daughter of a colonel of infantry. The halt of the car and a wordy discussion on the front seat caused the lieutenant to turn about again.

"This ain't the place," cried the corporal.

"Yaw," said Osc unmoved.

"You're crazy," cried the corporal. "Don't you suppose I know it when I see it? This here place has got a wall around it and the other had a fence."

"What's the matter," asked the officer, putting his head through the open window, "this the place or not?"

"No, sir, it ain't the place," said the corporal. "I never come out this way before, an' so I was lettin' Osc direct me bein' as how he knows all these back roads an' everything, an' here he come to a place that ain't it at all."

"Come," said Osc, "I show you der stag."

The corporal stopped the motor, and the

three men descended. Osc led them to the great iron gates and seeing between them at an angle, pointed.

"Dere he vos," said Osc. The other two bent their heads sharply and peeked through the bars. Sure enough, some distance away, on a portion of the lawn that was hidden from the road by the wall, was a wide-antlered stag.

"Ah, you —— dummie," cried the officer, "you've got a head like a cleaning rod. That stag is made out of bronze. I don't want a statue, I want a real one. And this is the stag you two soaks saw! I might have known! Beer and *fräuleins*, that's all you think about. Any other thought rebounds from your minds like water from a duck's back. Aw ——! Come on home and help me pack my foot-locker. I'm going home on the next transport."

The corporal hurriedly took a look. There was no doubt of the stag's being of bronze, albeit he stood on an invisible base and had his head lifted in a most lifelike attitude.

"Hey, Lootenant, wait a second," cried the corporal, "hey, now, I wasn't drunk that day. Yuh can't get drunk by two o'clock in the afternoon anyway. This ain't the place where we seen it. The stag I seen was bigger than that statue. An' I tell yuh it was movin'. It put down its head and lifted it up an' walked around and everything. Look, Osc, this ain't the place where we followed the *fräuleins*. Don't you remember that Sunday? There was a thing like that statue, only alive."

Osc scratched his head.

"Ve follows so many *fräuleins*," said he doubtfully. "Like dot vun, but alive you say? Vot we have to drink dot day?"

"Come home," said the lieutenant from the car, "get in the car and take me home or I'll have you tried. I'm going to resign." He slammed the door.

The two soldiers got sadly back into the car and the corporal started the motor.

"You're a good guy, Osc," said he, "but sometimes you ain't got a whole lot o' savvy. You're all the time chewin' the rag with these Jerries an' know all these roads an' everything, why don't you snap out of your dope an' remember where we seen that stag? Why don't chuh ask one o' these krauts along the road here?"

There was a sudden rapping on the glass.

"Take me home, —— it!" said the lieutenant. "I'm done with wandering around these roads with two idiots. Go home. When we get home go out and see if you can find some one that wants to buy a Sam Brown belt and a bedding roll cheap. I won't have any more use for mine."

The car was turned about and they went home, Osc and the corporal carrying on a whispered conversation on the front seat. As they went by headquarters, the officer again rapped on the glass, and directed the car to halt. Then he got out and with tight lips, slammed the door and went up the steps of the building.

"He's gone in to ask the Old Man to send him home," the corporal advised.

The lieutenant entered the door, replied absent-mindedly to the salutes of the sentries, and crossed the hall to a room marked *Aides de Camp*. This room connected with the general's office and no sooner had the officer entered and removed his cap and gloves than a buzzer hummed and he was summoned to the general's presence.

"Ha," said the general, "I expected you'd be here earlier. About the hunt, of course. Do you know that idea came to me some days ago? A stag hunt. Magnificent! I remember when I was at school we had a poem about a stag hunt. I can't remember who wrote it, but I've never forgotten it. Let's see:

"A stag at eve had drunk his fill,
Where danced the moon on Mullins rill,
And late that night had made his bed
Beneath Benvoirlich's old gray head.

So it goes on."

The general leaned back in his chair and smiled at the memory. He removed his glasses and beat time in the air with them.

"Now I remember some more of it.

"At once the bloodhounds' bloody bay
Resounded up the rocky way.

Fine poem. So it goes. They chased the stag, but it got away from them in the end. Well, we'll have one. We'll make 'em sit up and take notice. Let's get about it at once. The general has sent down into France already for some stag hounds, we've plenty of good horses to mount the party, there's all kinds of good country down river beyond Horchheim and there's nothing lacking to make this a never to be forgotten event."

"We might have some difficulty in finding a stag," suggested the officer. His resolution about resigning was rapidly fading. He might be able to turn the general's mind from the project of the hunt. Anyway, the old boy seemed to feel so good it would be a sin to spoil his good humor now.

"Yuh? The stag. Ah yes, that's true. They don't run wild in this country, but we can manage that. I'll look to you to take care of that. You see, what gave me the idea was this: There's a big estate out on the road to Oberlahnstein and last week I was coming by there and saw a stag in the park. It's a tame stag, you see, but we can hunt it just the same. We'll buy it or borrow it, or steal it, and return it right side up with care. We don't need to kill it, you see. We can give him a good start and let the hunt see him once or twice. Then, of course, the trail will end somewhere, at a brook for instance, and the stag will have escaped, being at that time safely in a quartermaster truck on his way home. There! Isn't that a fine idea?"

The general began to hum, beating time with his glasses.

"Waken the echoes far and near,
Deedeldy dee deedledydee
Oh, we go to hunt the deer.

There now," concluded the general, "skip along and find that place and tell the owner we want to borrow his stag. Explain to him that we won't hurt it, you know, and he won't object, I'm sure. Run along now, I want to hear by retreat that everything is arranged. This hunt comes off ten days from today."

The corporal and Osc threw away their cigarets as the lieutenant came out of headquarters, and both straightened their backs.

"Do you know how to get out to Oberlahnstein?" asked the lieutenant.

"We'll try it, sir," answered the corporal.

"Yaw!" cried Osc, "der place ve vent by der truck sometime! Yaw, I know, ve seen der stag und der two *fräuleins*. Ve come back by der boat und der stable sergeant fell overboard!"

"That's the place!" cried the corporal. "That's where we seen the stag."

"I know it," said the officer, "the general saw it himself. That's what gave him the idea. Well, we've got to go on with this thing, because it will break the Old Man's heart if it falls through. He's in there spouting poetry and singing to himself like a kid. Well, *en voiture! Nach* Oberlahnstein."

AGAIN the car left the town in a cloud of dust. The corporal expressed doubt after a while as to the road.

"Dond't vorry," said Osc, "ven ve comes to der next town ve asks. Dere vos some artillery lives by der town, dey know der vay."

The next town, however, was silent and deserted. The soldiers would for the most part be at drill, but there would always be a few clerks, strikers, chauffeurs, and various types of goldbricks about the streets. Not a soul was to be seen until, as they turned the corner into the Platz, they beheld two heavily armed sentinels, who presented arms as the car approached.

"Hey, guy," called the corporal, bringing the car to a stop and beckoning to the nearest guard, "yuh know the road to Oberlahnstein?"

"Nope," said the guard, "never heard of it. Keep on this one to Capellen, an' then ask there."

"What hit this town?" asked the corporal. "The outfit changed station?"

The guard spat.

"Nope," said he. "We kinda run outta mess funds an' we craved a chicken dinner. So we rung the bell the burgomaster rings when he's got a proclamation to make an' every one run to hear what the burgomaster had to say an' while they was hanging around the town hall we ganged up on the back yards an' gathered in all the chickens. Now the whole outfit's under arrest. We ate the chickens, though, they can't git them back. Every other night on guard. It ain't a —— of a lot o' fun."

"Yuh mind that, Osc," said the corporal, as the car went on its way once more. "They don't stand for no lootin' or no disrespect o' the Jerries' property. If this guy won't sell us his stag, we're gonna be out of luck."

"He sell it," said Osc unmoved. "I talk mit him. He sell it, I betcha."

The car continued up the valley, sliding through towns garrisoned by different detachments of the American Army—artillery, infantry and trains, and after assiduously inquiring the way, arrived before the gates of a large country estate. Osc and the corporal exchanged remarks of satisfaction. This was indeed the place and that hill over there was where the stag had disappeared when he took flight under a volley of stones propelled by the two Americans on that distant Sunday.

The iron gates were shut and furthermore chained together and locked with a padlock. Prolonged ringing of the bell by Osc finally produced an old man in a corduroy uniform, bearing upon the collar a replica of a hunting horn. Osc conversed with this man and the gate was unbarred and opened.

"Did you ask if this was the place?" cried the lieutenant. "Have they got a stag here?"

"I ask him, Lootenant," said Osc, "and he said 'No.' "

"Well, what the —— are we going in for then? Here, Corporal," cried the officer, "hold up! Oh, you dummies! You can't steer into any German's house you feel like. I'll be tried for fraternizing and God knows what. What the —— do you want to go in for if he hasn't got any stag?"

"He vos liar," said Osc. "Dey got stag here, ve seen him."

At the door of the great house they stopped, the officer got out and ascended the steps.

"Come, Osc," said he, "we've got to have an interpreter."

The corporal also clambered out of the car.

"You stay with the car, Corporal," directed the officer, "we don't need to all go in."

"Yessir, we better," said the corporal, "they might try to pull some rough stuff. I don't trust these Jerries."

The officer shrugged his shoulders and again rang the bell. To all appearances the house was dead. He rang again and muttered impatiently.

"It would be just our luck to have the boss of the house away," said the officer, "and not be able to get hold of this one stag."

"If the boss is away we'll go and take the stag anyway and fix it up with him after he comes back," remarked the corporal.

"Yes, and get a load of rock salt in our sterns while we're doing it. That old bird that let us in would rather touch off a shotgun at us than drink a barrel of beer. Come on, come on, what's the matter here? Everybody deaf?"

"I show dem," said Osc. "Ven comes der Germans to my country dey knocks once and den breaks down der door."

"Oh, —— no!" cried the officer and corporal both. "No rough stuff! We don't want to get hung. Don't go breaking down any doors."

Osc, however, was already in the driveway by the car, fumbling about on the ground. He bounded up the steps again, bearing in his hands a large round stone about the size of his head. This he hurled against the door, so that dust flew from the cracks and the house rang with the sound

"*Wacht auf!*" howled Osc, meaning "Drag out!" and lifting the rock from the top of the steps, where it had rolled, he bounded it against the door again.

"Here, enough!" cried the lieutenant aghast. "They will have my scalp if this ever gets back to headquarters. Lay off, —— it!"

He seized Osc by the arm as he bent for the rock the third time. The methods of the Osc's strong arm brought results, though, for a great rattling was heard as the door was unbarred and a sour-faced woman domestic appeared.

"Madam," said the officer, removing his cap, "is your husband at home?"

"She don't know vot you say," said Osc. "She ain't madam, anyway, she vos cook or *zimmermädchen*."

"Well, ask her is her master at home."

Osc and the woman exchanged remarks and the woman essayed to shut the door, but Osc had his foot in it.

"She says he ain't home," said Osc. "Come, ve go in."

He shoved the woman aside with his shoulder and then held the door open for the officer and the corporal to enter. They passed into a great square hall, a place that was poorly lighted, and whose dark panelings added to the gloom. At one side a staircase went up, lighted by tall stained glass windows, and a man in a dressing gown was descending this staircase. He was old, and his white hair gleamed in the semi-darkness. All felt instinctively that this was the lord of the manor, and when he spoke they were sure of it.

"What's he saying?" asked the officer with a sinking heart.

The German's tones were exceedingly cold and hostile and the officer began to fear that throwing rocks at a man's door and forcing one's way into his presence is not the best way in the world to secure a favorable answer to one's proposals.

"He vants to know how come you break down the door."

"Break down the door? Why the —— don't he answer the bell?" cried the officer.

He was becoming rather enraged at the fact that the German regarded him with hostility through a monocle, his nose crinkled as if he smelled something unpleasant, and his whole manner one of disdain for his callers. He did not offer to receive the Americans in any other room save the entrance hall.

"Tell him," continued the officer after a moment's thought, "that we've got a little party on and we want to borrow his stag to show the boys. Tell him they never saw a stag before and it will be quite a treat for them."

Osc complied. The German gave a hoarse laugh and began a long dissertation on what right the Americans had to force their way into his house; what right had they in Germany, anyway, or in Europe, for that matter; what did they mean, stag? He had not seen one since he was a child.

This Osc translated, expressing his firm conviction after every word that the German was a liar.

"I tell him ve burn his house down he don't giff dot stag!" cried Osc. "I fix him. We roast his little tosies und he show us der stag!"

"Here, for —— sake don't say anything like that!" gasped the officer. "He'll go and complain to the Old Man and I'll do a ten-year stretch. Use some discretion. You can't get away with any strong-arm stuff in the American Army. Look, tell him if he don't sell us his stag, we'll go to the burgomaster and get an order for it."

This remark should have disturbed the German, for the German authorities were doing anything in their power to conciliate the Americans, and if the Americans had asked for the stag, or the house itself, the burgomaster would certainly give it to them. The man on the stairs, however, only sniffed disdainfully when Osc translated. He waved his hand in a gesture of scorn, and turning his back squarely went up the stairs again. It was clear that the interview was at an end.

The three went back to the car with no further word. The corporal opened the door and the lieutenant climbed in. Then he turned to Osc.

"When we get back," said he, "I want you to start packing my stuff immediately. Here I've wasted a whole morning fooling around when I might have stayed at home. It's what I get for taking the advice of two lager hounds and trying to find a stag in this part of the world. Why doesn't Salt Cod organize a tiger hunt and ask me to find him a tiger and a few elephants? Let's have a stag hunt! Fine! I'll get the credit and my aide will do the work! Home! —— it, home!"

He slammed the door.

There was another conference on the front seat and as the car approached the gate and the old servant in corduroy appeared to close it after them, the car stopped and Osc descended. He beckoned to the gatekeeper and, having issued cigarets, he engaged him in conversation. The lieutenant rapped on the glass and, receiving no response, opened the sliding pane.

"Here, Corporal," he demanded, "what's the idea? I suppose he's bargaining for a keg for Saturday night. What do you mean by stopping without permission? This my car or yours? My ——, you'd think I was an officer in the Bolshevik army. If my chauffeur wants to go he goes, and when he feels like stopping he does. Well, you just hustle along, young man, unless you want to get a job chauffeuring a wheel-barrow full of rocks for about six months. Leave that squarehead to walk home."

"He's dickerin' with that old guy, sir," said the corporal very respectfully. "The old bird is the gamekeeper, that's what the horn on his collar means, an' Osc thinks maybe he can give him a bar of soap or somethin' an' he'll tip us off where the stag is. Then we can come up in a truck an' swipe said stag."

"Home!" said the lieutenant with a lack-luster eye.

Obediently the corporal made the motor roar, but the car did not move. The corporal was watching Osc, who seemed to be making progress with the gamekeeper. The officer closed the glass with a bang and the corporal eased the car along a few feet. Osc and the gamekeeper were seen to shake hands and Osc pressed a cake of soap upon the other. Then he ran to the car and climbed up on the seat.

"I tell you I fix it," cried Osc, as the car passed through the gate. "I give him cake of soap. For diamonds dey vouldn't do anyt'ing but for a cake of soap, vot dese Germans vouldn't do! Und he says he vill show us vere der stag is und ve could come and get him, and all he asks ve should give him is ten t'ousand marks."

"Tell that to the lootenant," cried the corporal, and Osc, opening the pane, repeated the glad news to the officer. The officer regarded him with no show of interest.

"Home!" said the officer. "The next man that says 'stag' to me goes in the mill. Come home and pack my things and not another word out of you."

Osc thereupon closed the pane and the rest of the journey home was passed in silence.

When he arrived at his quarters, the lieutenant dismissed the car, directed Osc to start packing, and then, taking his gloves and riding crop, he hurried over to headquarters, to get there before the general left for dinner.

"I'm going to resign," muttered the officer, "and furthermore, I'll tell Salt Cod just what I think of him. Let him try me if he dares." He mounted the steps, passed through the door of the headquarters building, and so to the presence of the general.

"Aha!" cried the general at sight of his aide, "you've been busy this morning, I see. So have I. I've done a few things myself."

The general stood in the center of the room, a cigar in his mouth and his cap on his head. "Look here!" He pointed to a huge lithograph that stood on a chair. This picture represented a stag taking to the sea, while the baffled hounds and huntsmen stood on the shore. "I found that in the city," said the general with pride. He put on his glasses. "You see it shows the stag and the hounds, but particularly the uniform. I'm to be the huntsman and I want to do it according to form, d'yuh see, in proper uniform. Now this man is the master, this man with the horn. He has a green coat and white breeches. I've had my measure taken for the coat and I've found just the color. Huntsman's green with yellow facings. Also a velvet cap. I thought he was going to embroider it with gold when he told me the price, but it's all right, once in a lifetime. We'll make the Allies sit up, eh? Now, tell me, you've found the stag, of course, and all's well? We must keep it very dark. Take him out in the woods and picket him. Not a soul must know he isn't wild.

'He was a stag, a stag of ten, ever sing
merrily, merrily'

That's in the same poem I was telling you about.

'A stag at eve had drunk his fill—

(I wish I could remember it all.)

'Where danced the moon on Monons rill
And late that night had made his bed where
Hangs Ben Vorlich's shaggy head.

(Now what was the rest! ——!)

'At dawn he heard the huntsman's horn
That heralded the coming morn.
And when he heard the first loud toot,
The stag got up and pulled his foot.'

"There!" concluded the general, "that last is as good as the first, even if I did write it myself. Horn and morn are a good rhyme, but toot and foot aren't quite regulation. Come, tell us about the stag! Is he a good one? I wish I could have a photographer along to take a picture of me in my green coat with my foot on the stag's neck. How many prongs has he got on his horns? I wish I could see him now. Won't he look fine ahead of a grand field of galloping horses and running hounds! Too bad they can't all wear proper costume!"

The general paused for breath and the officer, having made one final effort to screw up his courage, sighed heavily and succumbed.

"Sir," said the lieutenant, "the owner of the stag displayed some hostility to us, but my orderly, who speaks German like a native, has arranged the matter with him, so that I think we can promise the stag for the date set. I'll arrange to have a corral built and we'll keep him in the woods."

"Yes, yes," said the general, tapping his glasses on his knee, "that's fine, that's fine, but our chief difficulty will be to find a horn. You see the master in that picture has a horn around his shoulders. Now I must have a horn and it's going to be a hard job to find one. Furthermore, I can't blow a note on it, but that won't make any difference. I'll carry it and have my sergeant trumpeter come along to sound the horn whenever we have need of it."

"Is that all, sir?" asked the lieutenant.

"Yes, that's all. Things are going beautifully. Good morning."

THE aide took his departure and went back to his quarters, where he found Osc surrounded by piles of shirts, boots, breeches, and débris of bedding-roll and foot-locker.

"Put that stuff back where it belongs," ordered the officer, "and go get the corporal. Tell him to report here after dinner for a council of war. Meanwhile say nothing about this stag."

"Der lootenant not vant to pack?" asked Osc.

"No, I've changed my mind."

"Ve put it all back, vot?"

"Yes, put it all back, and stand by to receive orders after mess."

After mess the corporal, Osc and the lieutenant gathered in the officers' room for a council of war.

"First off," began the officer, "we've got to get the stag. I'm going through with this thing because if it falls through, the living exponent of the cod fishing industry will die of grief. He's bought himself a green coat and everything, and he's practising on a horn. It's not for me to be disrespectful of authority and discuss my superiors in the presence of enlisted men, but what I've said I'll stick by. Now we must get the stag. Osc, sound off! What did Corduroy Pants up there say?"

"Vell," said Osc slowly and wrinkling his brows, "he vos keeper und also he unlocks der gates and drives der cows home. Vell he says der aind't no stag und I says I seen it, vot the —— he mean der aind't no stag? So he says vot you vant mit dot stag und I says ve vant him for a circus vot ve gonna have. So he says no, ve can't have him. So den I giffs him der soap."

Osc paused and looked about for something.

"Talkin' makes my t'roat dry," said he.

"Pass the canteen," said the lieutenant calmly, "there's nice fresh water in it."

"Neffer mind," said Osc, "dond't bodder. I aind't so dry yet I drinks vater. Vell, I giffs him der soap und he says for ten t'ousand marks ve haff der stag. He say he bring him to a liddle house in der voods vere he goes to get fed, und ve come mit a truck und take him avay."

"When?" cried the officer.

"Vell," said Osc patiently, "chust den der car starts to go und I not vant to valk home, so ve dond't talk no more."

"There!" said the officer, "that's a load off my mind. We've got the stag and now all we have to do is to go out after him. How much is ten thousand marks?"

"About a dollar and a quarter," said the two soldiers together.

"Well, we can give him that, all right. Osc, go out there as soon as you can and see that man and find out where this house is and arrange for delivery of that stag. We'll fix up a corral in the woods and you can live out there and look after him for a few days. Secrecy, that's the word! We mustn't let any one in on this, or let it get around that this stag is tame. That's why we must leave it out in the woods until the day of the hunt."

"How we gonna get him back here?" asked the corporal. "We gotta get a truck an' three men can't never load a stag in a truck in God's world. He'll give us a prod with them horns an' that's the end."

"That's so," agreed the officer. "Well, we'll have to find some soldiers of discretion and let them into the secret. How about First Sergeant Melody?"

"Nope," said the corporal. "He's under arrest; can't go nowheres."

"How come under arrest!" cried the officer. "What did he ever do? Why, he's one of the best soldiers in the outfit."

"I know," said the corporal, "but you know his outfit is stationed out there in the weeds an' they get kinda lonesome, so some of 'em walk around now and then with a *fräulein*. Well, the top, of course, is human, so Melody singles out a nice little plump one and they get along fine, only the kraut that was goin' with her before Melody cut him out didn't crave it for a nickel, so he gets his friends an' they gang up on Melody an' pass him a beatin'. Yeh, about twenty of 'em. So Haitch company goes down in a body, under command o' top sergeant Melody, an' makes a desert outta that town. Sir, I ain't kiddin' yuh. There ain't been a male kraut seen in that vicinity since."

"And they put Melody in arrest for taking the outfit down?"

"Naw, only fer fraternizin'. He ain't got no business fraternizin' with no *fräulein*. He might tell her the secret code or somethin'."

"Well, how about the men in headquarters company—any of them available?"

"Well, no, some are on leave an' some are goin' to school and Corporal Neff is gonna get broke an' transferred, and Sergeant Lawrence what is the only one left with any savvy, is also confined to quarters."

"Has he been fraternizing? I thought he was married."

"Huh!" grunted the corporal. "You wanta watch them married guys. Ever hear the yarn about the tiger that tasted blood? Well, anyway, he ain't in for fraternizin'. The last time we had a review the colonel come home from Coblenz late an' here was Lawrence shootin' at the roosters on the weather-vanes. He said they made a keen target against the moon. He told the colonel if he brought one down the colonel could have it for breakfast. So they lead him away in chains."

"Well, who will we get? As you say, we can't do it alone. Who then?"

"Well, we got to get a truck from the supply company, we might as well get some o' them mule skinners. They'd know how to load this stag, bein's they're used to leadin' mules. They can build a corral, too."

"All right, see what you can do. Osc, go out this afternoon and fix it up with that keeper. We'll start the corral and as soon as we get hay and things out there, we'll go and get the stag."

"Who look after dot stag ven he comes by der corral?"

"Why, you. We can't let any one else into this. I don't dare trust any one. The corporal can't do it; he's got to drive the general around. And of course I can't do it."

"Humm," said Osc. "Vell, all right. It be cold out dere. I must have plenty blankets und coffee—you know, coffee—to drink. Mitout coffee I die of cold."

"No, nix," objected the officer. "No coffee. Now no coffee is to be drunk here or at the corral or anywhere. Corporal, you tell the mule skinners there's to be no drinking. I've had charge of details before where every man was lighted to the eyebrows. I won't have it. You tell 'em and you listen, Osc, if any one shows up smelling of coffee, I'll take off this little Sam Brown belt and this cute little blouse and I'll make that man look as if some one had busted a barrel of red paint over his skull. Now mind!"

For those that do not know, "coffee" was the slang or common term for a very black heavy ale that looked exactly like black coffee when poured, but which had a much different effect on the internal organism.

Osc looked resigned and remarked that he would have to have a pass for overnight, as the lair of the stag was a long journey on foot.

"I'll give you an order for a sidecar," said the officer. "Go tell Lundt to take you out in his. You can be back by retreat. Beat it! Now then, Corporal, circulate around between now and five o'clock and get a choice gang together to help us load the stag. When all is ready I'll ask the general for the loan of his car and we'll go out and superintend the transferal of the Monarch of the Glen to his new home."

Osc reported that night that the arrangements for the theft of the stag had been completed. There was a small shed in a remote corner of the park where hay used to be spread for the animals that roamed therein once upon a time, and of which the stag was the sole survivor. The stag came to this shelter every evening for a meal of hay and here he would be detained so that the Americans might come and get him. There was a gate at hand, and the truck could be driven in this gate. The gamekeeper had impressed the fact upon Osc that this was all at the Americans' risk, that if they were caught he, the gamekeeper, would deny all complicity in the matter.

The question of where the stag would be kept was a more difficult matter, for it was necessary to select a place that was not only unfrequented by Americans, but by Germans also, for there would undoubtedly be a hue and cry after the stag was stolen, and it would never do to have the beast recovered by his proper owners. This would be a scandal not only to the disgrace of the lieutenant for stealing him, but to the American Army for having prepared a tame stag to be hunted as a wild one.

At last a place was found, some distance from town, out in the hills where the hunt was to be held. It took three days of search to find the location, and then three more days were consumed in getting the supplies for the corral and getting it built. On the evening of the eighth day since the affair began, and two days before the hunt, Osc reported that he had notified the gamekeeper to be ready that night to deliver the stag, and the corporal announced that the truck and one or two tried friends were at hand and available whenever the officer should require them.

"Well, I hope this thing is showing signs of life at last," said the lieutenant, when the two had reported. "I won't be content until that stag is safely in the corral. Here we're only two days from the hunt and really no nearer than we were before to having a stag. You sure this Jerry friend of yours won't double cross us? Did he seem glad to see you?"

"I'll say he vos glad," said Osc, nodding his head vigorously, "he vanted to kiss me. He said he t'ought I vos dead. He got his eye on ten t'ousand marks, you bet. I giff him two already und der rest ven ve get stag in truck."

"Good," said the officer, "after supper we proceed."

The general was only too glad to lend his car for the evening, and with Osc on the front seat with the corporal, they sped out of town. The night was clear and quiet, with no wind whatsoever. The car sped through town after town and Osc directing, they avoided the road that led to the *schloss* and turned into a narrow side road, where the officer rapped upon the glass.

"Sir?" cried the corporal.

"Leave the car here," said the officer. "Leave it here and we'll go on foot. Is it far, Osc?

"Naw, not far."

"Well, let's leave the car and the truck here and lead the stag down. Do you think he's tame enough to lead?"

"Vell, ve try it," said Osc.

"Was that the truck we passed coming through that last town?"

"Yessir," said the corporal.

"How's he going to find his way up here?" cried the officer. "Did you tell him where to go so that he won't make a mistake?"

"Osc told him," said the corporal. "Gregorio's drivin' the truck. He claimed he knew just where to go because he used to come here for firewood when the truck train was quartered out near here."

"Well, let's hope he doesn't get lost. How many men did you have come out? Not more than two or three, I hope."

The night was still, a bad night for theft, thought the officer, for sound would carry a long way. Better a driving rain and howling wind. There! He could hear the truck away down on the level road, a good mile away. He listened and heard it begin to grind as the driver shifted gears for the climb up the hill.

"He ain't missed the road," said the corporal. "He's turned off an' is comin' up the hill."

"Let's hope the old boy up at the house doesn't get alarmed at hearin' a truck out here. He might get suspicious."

"He won't," said the corporal. "He wouldn't know it was Americans."

The truck continued to grind up the hill, its exhaust thundering. It made a terrific racket and a distant dog began to bark. Another joined it and the night began to grow hideous with the howling and snapping of the aroused dogs and the grunting of the truck.

"Oh, man, this is awful!" groaned the lieutenant. "They'll have the whole countryside awake. ——, what a noise!"

Suddenly a new sound burst upon his ear. The men in the truck had begun to sing and from the sound there must be a young regiment of them.

"Oh, the captain says to the sargint,
What have you got to drink?
The sargint says to the captain
We've got some nice *vin blink*.
The captain says to the sargint,
Well, pour it down the sink.
For we don't drink wine in the calvaree,
We don't drink wine in the calvaree,
We don't drink wine in the calvaree,
All we drink is blood an' coneyac."

The hills echoed to the crash of the chorus and the lieutenant, muttering words that he had not used since the armistice, ran down the hill toward the truck. Osc and the corporal heard him calling profanely upon the driver to halt, and then clearly heard the officer order the men to be silent.

"What the melted brimstone and liquid sulphur are you drooling lunatics thinking of?" cried the lieutenant. "Do you want every German this side of the Rhine up here, to say nothing of all the military police in the zone of occupation. What the —— is the grand idea of bellowing like that? Do you think you're a bunch of mavericks?"

There was instant and respectful silence in the truck. Then one spoke.

"Sir," said he, "the truck was makin' so much noise, we thought we'd sing and drownd the racket."

The officer groaned. "Well, don't sing any more," said he. "Drive the truck up where you see the lights of the car and then leave it. The rest of you get out and follow me. Driver, stay with the truck and keep your eye on my car, too. Put out all the lights."

There was scrambling in the truck's interior and men began to pour over the tailgate. Four, eight, ten, fourteen, the lieutenant's startled eye counted. In the darkness their numbers seemed many times multiplied. The officer led the way to where Osc and the corporal waited.

"What outfit are these men from?" he demanded.

"They're from the artillery supply company," said the corporal.

"Why didn't you bring the whole regiment?"

"Well, things is kinda dull an' they all wanted to come an' we may need 'em. We can use 'em for pickets or something. It won't do no harm to have a line of outposts or a little reserve in case the Jerry double crosses us."

The officer mused upon this a moment and saw the truth of it. "Well, come on," said he, "on our way. Where do you meet your friend, Osc?"

"He vait by der gate. Dere is a gate up der road avays."

"Come on, then. Be quiet, men."

The officer and Osc started up the narrow road or rather cart track and the others followed. It was dark and branches tripped them. The men crashed into bushes and stumbled over stones with the noise of a regiment.

"Hist!" they cried to each other, "don't make so much noise!" Matches snapped and cigarets were lighted. The officer, looking over his shoulder, was reminded of a torchlight procession.

"Put out those —— cigarets!" he cried. "Do you birds realize this is just as serious as a war? Do you want a pound or so of rock salt shoved up your back by a Jerry shotgun? Go easy, or you'll wreck the whole works. Why the —— didn't you get some infantry that had been on patrol once in a while?" he demanded of the corporal. "What earthly good are artillerymen and mule skinners at that, for a job like this?"

"The infantry are all Johns," said the corporal. "I took the artillery because they're the only outfit that's got any of the old gang left."

The column proceeded in darkness. A man would fall down, and rising, give his opinion of things in general. Each of the remaining thirteen men would cry to him to be silent and the lieutenant would tear his hair.

"This is going to stop!" he cried. "Why, they can hear us in Coblenz! I'm going to send all those thugs back."

The way was long and stony and the officer began to lose courage. The day of the hunt was so near, the visiting officers were arriving on the morrow, and if the stag should not be available, ruin would be immediate and terrible. Suppose, as they turned the next corner, the provost marshal surrounded by his acolytes should step out and put them all under arrest for theft, fraternization, betrayal of military secrets, drunkenness, and riot and tumult on the public highway? By ——, there was a man there!

"Here ve are," said Osc, "und my friend der keeper mit."

Osc and the keeper at once exchanged a volley of hoarse whispers and the keeper beckoning, turned about and led the way through an open gate.

"He certainly was punctual," remarked the officer. "I'm all cheered up. I had visions of waiting here half the night for him to put in an appearance.

"He said he come right down from der house so soon he hear us comin'," said Osc.

"So soon he hear us coming? From the house? Oh my ——!" groaned the officer. "Well, it must be all right, or he wouldn't have come. Lead out and show us the stag."

They went a little way beyond the gate and came to a shed from which came a smell reminiscent of the zoo. This shed was protected on three sides from the weather, but the fourth was open and going in this open side, Osc and the guide halted and a conference began.

"What's he saying?" asked the lieutenant nervously.

"He says here is der stag und vere is der eight t'ousand marks?"

"Where's the stag?"

"Right here. Turn on der light und you see him!"

"Hold!" cried the officer. "A bright thought occurs to me. Everybody put on a mask. Tie a handkerchief around your face so that we can't be identified if there's a row about this."

The soldiers exclaimed delightedly. This was stuff near to their hearts and in a few seconds every one was masked, including the officer. Then the latter turned on his flashlight.

Here, at last, where the officer could reach out and touch him, was the stag. He was a real stag, with great branching horns. He did not look much like the pictures of stags the officer remembered having seen. He was far from being as big as the Monarch of the Glen in the steel engraving, but he was quite a passable stag. He was lying down and his head was upon his forefeet, as though he slept.

"Is he alive?" asked the officer.

"Sure, he vos alive," said Osc. He gave the stag a vigorous kick and the beast opened one eye.

"He don't look it," said the corporal.

"Well, let's get him out of here. Who's got any suggestions as to the best method?"

The officer turned his flashlight about the circle. The men were grouped tightly in the shed, their eyes wide and shining in the light, the handkerchiefs about their faces moving in and out as they breathed. They looked alternately at the stag and at the officer. Suddenly the officer noted that a little retired from the crowd was another German. This one did not wear corduroys as did the keeper who stood by Osc, but was attired in a long black coat, wooden shoes, and a woolen cap. A muffler was wound about the lower part of his face.

"I'd say to put a rope around his neck an' lead him," said the corporal.

"Yuh can't do that," spoke up a man from the crowd. "Who the —— ever heard o' leadin' a deer with a rope? He'd give a leap and gone. An' them deers rear back and let drive at a man with their feet, too."

"We c'n hobble him," spoke another.

"Here," interrupted the officer, "before we get any deeper into this matter, who's this other Jerry?" And he pointed to the muffled German. Osc conferred with the keeper.

"He vants his eight t'ousand marks," said Osc.

"Tell him to go to ——, we'll give him his money when the stag's in the truck. Who's his friend?"

"He says he's der farm boy, he helps mit der stag und cows. He come down to see der fun."

The officer started to express his disapproval, but another soldier interrupted.

"I know what to do, sir," said he, "let's hog-tie the stag an' carry him down to the truck on poles."

The officer thought upon this proposition a second or two, gazing at the masked face of the man who had offered the suggestion. Nothing was visible of this man's features but his eyes and these suddenly acquired an expression of pained surprize, and the soldier's body swayed slightly forward. The eyes were seen to shift from left to right. It occurred to the officer that such a proposition would entail considerable labor on the part of the men and that undoubtedly some one disapproving of the idea had sneaked around the back of the crowd and planted his hobnailed shoe somewhere in the vicinity of the termination of the other's spine.

"Ask your friend if he thinks we can drive the stag down to the truck," the officer directed Osc. "If we can't, ask him if he's got any ideas as to how we can get him loaded."

While Osc went into conference with the keeper, the officer snapped out his light and sidled around the back of the crowd with the intention of having a look at the mysterious German. He discovered that this man had left the shed and was standing outside under the stars. The officer approached him stealthily. Snap! the light went on and discovered the alleged farm-boy lighting a cigaret. The officer saw a diamond gleam on the hand that held the match, a hand that was much too white for a peasant's. There was a sudden stir of excitement, the sound of running feet, and a panting soldier appeared.

"Hey, Lootenant," he gasped, "the place is pinched an' the M. P.'s have got Skipper!"

The departure of the assembled company from the shed was precipitate. A confused sound of flight, silence, and they were gone.

"He says he didn't say he vould put der stag in der truck, he says here is der stag, giff him his eight t'ousand marks." Thus Osc, who still spoke with the keeper.

"Shut up!" said the officer. "What's all this about? Who's pinched? Who's Skipper?" The panting soldier pointed silently and the officer heard a faint sound of marching feet and caught the gleam of flashlights.

"They mustn't see me here!" thought the officer, and followed by the corporal, he ran out into the road.

"Where's this officer?" asked a stern heavy voice. Three men appeared, one still masked, and the other two following with flashlights. The masked man had his hands in the air and was menaced by a pistol held by one of the others.

"What's the matter here?" asked the officer.

One of the three stepped forward and the lieutenant, turning on his flashlight, recognized the Military Police officer who rode about in the sidecar, taking the numbers of automobiles and turning them in to the provost marshal, and who was not friendly to the general's aide.

"Are you responsible for this man?" asked the M. P. officer.

"Certainly," replied the lieutenant. "What's the idea in arresting him and making all this display of guns?"

"We found a truck and a limousine parked by the side of the road with no lights and when we stopped to investigate, a masked man appears. That's certainly not very regular."

"Why not?" asked the lieutenant. "What's the idea of running down the battery by leaving lights on?"

"What's the idea of the mask?" asked the officer coldly.

"Why, I suppose the mosquitoes were thick down there by the road and he didn't want to be bothered by them."

"You've got one on yourself," remarked the M. P. This the lieutenant remembered, to his chagrin. "Well, there are mosquitoes up in the woods as well as on the road," he muttered.

"What are you doing in the woods?" asked the M. P. "This is no time to be hanging around woods."

"You know who I am, of course," said the lieutenant. "Well, we're getting ready for the field day tomorrow and we're cutting brush. That's what the truck is for and of course I have permission to take the general's car to look after things."

The Military Police officer snorted. He thirsted for blood and felt that he had every excuse for arresting this officer. He wanted to arrest him because of the personal matter and also because he was the general's aide, but for that very reason he did not dare. Salt Cod was not an officer to be trifled with, and any overzealous guardian of the military peace that arrested his aide was liable to find himself suddenly removed from office and sent home.

"Hm," said the M. P. officer at last, "this is highly irregular. I'm going to turn in a complete report of it."

"That's your privilege," said the lieutenant.

"You don't need to tell me what my privileges are," barked the other. "Turn that man loose, Sergeant Jones, and let's go back to the car."

The Military Police turned and tramped off into the darkness.

The lieutenant gave a gesture of despair. His detail had fled and how would he load the stag without helpers? From the direction of the road came a faint shout.

"Who won the war?" Then from close at hand a thundering reply from fourteen throats, "The M. P.'s!"

"Cut out that —— yelling," cried the lieutenant. "Cut it out! I'll put every one of you in arrest, by ——!"

Again there was silence. The officer groaned. If the countryside was not aroused by now, nothing would awaken it. He returned to Osc and the shed.

"You never get anywhere asking for advice in the Army," said the lieutenant. "I'm done with it. Also I'm done with standing to horse. Here, Corporal, where the —— are you?" The corporal, who had been at the officer's side all through the interview, stepped up. "Get hold of that gang of thieves," directed the officer, "and have 'em form a skirmish line. If any one tries to get through, sock him. Then you go down and bring up the truck. Have you got a flashlight? Good. Take another man and the two of you help guide the truck. I'll have some of these mule skinners hog-tie the stag and we'll lift him into the truck."

The sound of shuffling feet showed that the men had returned from their retreat and they eagerly seized the order to form a skirmish line about the shed, and some distance from it. They brandished strange looking clubs, and the lieutenant, examining one of these with curiosity, found it was composed of a stick with a hexagonal steel nut on the end of it. A blow from such a club would remove a man from the scene of combat for some time. The men formed their line of pickets, crying "Hist" and "Hush" to each other and then Osc and a mule skinner proceeded to hog-tie the stag, that is, tie his feet together and thus prevent his kicking. The stag offered no resistance. From the road came the roar of the truck's motor and then the grinding of its gears. The noise was terrific.

"He can't be backing up the path!" thought the lieutenant. The sound seemed to indicate that he was. The truck ground and ground, and at intervals came shouts and howls.

"Whoa! Go ahead a ways! Cut her to the right! Good enough! Right back, now. WHOA!" There was a sound of bushes being crushed to earth and hearty cursing. There was an interchange of recriminations and then the grinding of the gears began again. Then Osc reported that the stag was ready. The row of pickets gave passwords to each other and beat the bushes with their clubs.

"All is lost," groaned the lieutenant, "but I've got the stag and if the Jerry that owns him thinks he can get him back, let him try. Stand by, everybody, here's the truck. Let's bear a hand and get him in."

The outposts rushed in, the truck came to a stop and stood thundering outside the gate, as if it grumbled at the strain and overwork of backing up the narrow road.

"In with the beast," cried the officer. "In with him. Shove some poles under him and let's have him in!"

There was a sort of portable manger near the shed and this was rapidly demolished. With the long thick slats with which it had been built, the men proceeded to lift the stag, and grunting and heaving, carry him to the truck and slide him in over the tail-gate.

"Tuck in his legs," they cried. "Look out fer them horns. In with him now!" In he went and the tailboard went up with a sound similar to that of the discharge of a six-inch howitzer.

"Hurray, boys!" cried the officer. "Make all the noise you want to. The stag's in the truck. Wait, now, I want to speak to the driver."

He went to the foot of the truck. "Listen, driver, that Military Police officer will be hanging around, waiting to see what we've got in the truck. Now I'll put my striker on the seat with you and follow the truck with my car. When we get to where the stag is to be put off, I'll pass you and the M. P. will follow me, because he'll want to keep my car in sight. When he passes you, stop, unload the stag and my striker, and then come right along. It won't take a minute and he'll never know that you've stopped. Thus we'll fox him. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Go ahead and wait for us on the main road."

The truck rattled off, its sideboards banging as the wheels sank now on one side, now on the other in the soft ground. The officer went back to where Osc, the corporal, and the keeper stood.

"Here's his eight thousand marks," said the lieutenant, handing them to Osc, who in turn passed them to the keeper. Then Osc began a harangue. He spoke at some length, and while he orated, the officer removed his own mask and wiped his forehead with it.

"Come, Osc," he said, "cut it short. We've got to be going."

Osc uttered a few more sentences and waved his hand in air in a gesture of disdain. It was plain that he had been giving his opinion of the German race. Hate and contempt dripped from every word he spoke, even though his hearers had no comprehension of their meaning. With one final rapid disgorgement of harsh accents, Osc made an end. The keeper laughed heartily.

"Vell I be ——," said Osc. "Vot you know about dot?"

"Come, come, let's go," said the officer.

He seized Osc by the arm and the three hastened down to the road. Here the officer stopped suddenly and made as if to retrace his steps.

"By ——, I forgot," he cried. "I wanted to have a look at that other sausage mangler, the one the keeper said was a farm boy. He had a diamond on his lily white hand. I meant to have a go at him two or three times, but each time something interrupted. Something is wrong here. You sure that wasn't a cow he sold us, or anything like that?"

"Naw," said Osc. "It vos stag—cows dond't have horns like dot. I smell a dead fish here someveres. I tell dot keeper, after ve have stag in truck und all is gone, dot——stag vot he luff so much ve hunt mit dogs und der British und der Belgians ve all hunt mit dem der stag. Vot he t'ink of dot? Und der dogs dey catch der stag und tear him little bits in. How he like dot? Und he laugh like ——. Vell I be——."

"Well, they can't do nuthin' now. We got the stag," said the corporal. "Now home, I suppose."

"Now, wait. Listen, Osc, you ride on

the truck and when we get to the corral, you jump off, and they'll unload the stag for you. You've got chow and blankets and everything, haven't you? Now, then, beat it. Corporal, I'm going to ride with you because I've got a hunch our police friend is laying for us."

"He won't dare pinch us—we ain't doing anything," said the corporal, as he climbed to the seat of the limousine. "What's eatin' him anyway?"

"He's just like a lot of people," said the officer. "They're too interested in other people's business. If he can catch some poor shavetail at something and run him for a general court he's happier than a doughboy with a skinful of champagne. Well, now we'll fox him. Go ahead with the truck. We'll follow."

Sure enough, the limousine had not gone half a mile before the officer suspected he heard the barking of a motorcycle. The truck made considerable racket ahead, but when the corporal shut off his motor and coasted down a short hill, there was no doubt. They could both hear another machine behind them and running without lights, for in looking back the officer could see no sign of it.

"Do you know where the corral is?" asked the officer. "Do you suppose Osc can find the corral in this darkness?"

"Sure," said the corporal, "he's been there enough. He ain't keen about stayin' out there all alone, but it's only for a couple o' nights."

The truck and the limousine went through town after town in a cloud of dust and startled the dogs into a barking chorus. They passed through the town where brigade headquarters was and continued on down river toward Coblenz. After a time the truck swung off to the left, but the limousine continued straight on.

"Stop here! Stop here!" cried the lieutenant. The brakes squealed and the limousine stopped. Both men poked their heads around and listened. They heard the faint sound of the motorcycle, then it came nearer, passed the road where the truck had turned off, and came thundering downhill.

"Put out your lights," said the lieutenant, "and let's go."

Away went the car, the motorcycle and sidecar in pursuit. The road was straight, and easily discernible under the stars. It was not long, though, before the barking of the pursuing machine became clearly audible and then gradually drew alongside.

"Pull over!" came a faint hail from the sidecar.

"Sure, pull over," whispered the lieutenant, in response to a questioning nudge from the corporal. The limousine swerved to the side of the road and an incoherent officer appeared from the shadows.

"I've got you," said he. "At last, by ——, I've got you."

"Good!" said the lieutenant cheerfully. "And what crime have we committed?"

"Your tail-light's out, and by ——, I'm going to turn you in for it."

"That's too bad," said the lieutenant. "I suppose we might as well go home now. Turn around, Corporal."

"Where's the truck?" demanded the Military Police officer.

"What truck?"

"Why, the truck that was with you. The truck that was up on the hill with no lights."

"Oh, that truck. Well, you see their tail-light was out, too," explained the lieutenant, "and we've lost track of them. They must be quite far down river by now."

The other officer turned without a word and ran to his sidecar into which he leaped and the machine disappeared in a cloud of dust that glimmered ghostily in the starlight.

"Come, we might as well go home," said the officer. "The stag's safely in bed by now."

They returned to the road that led to the corral. The corral was just a little way in the woods and the truck had unloaded and already departed. They could see its red light winking far up the road.

"Stop!" said the lieutenant. "I wonder if everything is all right up there. I ought to go up and see, but the Military Prince might come along and find the stag and although the transaction is all aboveboard and everything, he'd tell every one we were hunting a tame stag and the party would be ruined. I wonder, though. Maybe they haven't left any hay. Has he got a halter-shank or anything to tie the beast with?"

The corporal shut off the engine, with the intention of getting out and running up to the corral, leaving the officer with the car. In the silence that followed the cessation of the motor they heard the distant crowing of a cock, a dog barking away off toward Coblenz, and then a faint strain of melody, as if the old German forest elves were making merry up there among the trees.

"That's Osc playin' his accordion," whispered the corporal. The music of the accordion was suddenly accompanied by song.

"On vinter nights mit no moon lights,
Und dark und cold as ——
Oh vere vas I? Mit sleepy eye,
Der O. D. can not tell.
Mitout a sound I dismounts down
Und den der fun begin.
Der captain's stair I climbs mit care
Und goes der kitchen in.
I sits me down der fire roun
Und drinks der captain's stout.
Comes der captain der front door in
I goes der back door oudt."

"It's Osc," said the corporal, "he's all right."

He started the motor once more and they returned to town, nor were they disturbed by the fact that the sidecar passed them and halted the truck, but finding nothing therein, and the driver having a written order to place himself at the disposal of the lieutenant in the limousine, nothing could be done and the truck was released. The passengers would fain have sung, but this was a breach of the peace at such an hour, so they were forced to preserve silence all the way home.

The next day the official visit began. The weather was clear and just cool enough to make marching pleasant. There was a review in the morning—some of the units had to make a two-day march to take part in it, so far from the center of things were their billets—then the cavalry detachment staged a cotillion drill, and every one went home for lunch.

The general of brigade who was disrespectfully known as Salt Cod took one of the British officers to his temporary home in the car, and then directed the chauffeur to proceed to the general's quarters.

"Wait a moment," said the general, when the car stopped before the door, "you can take my aide home. Come in, Lieutenant, I want just a word with you." The lieutenant closed the door of the limousine and followed the general into the house. Not a word was said. The general led the way to his bedroom and opening the great clothes-press, took out a green frock coat.

"There!" said the general. "Isn't that a good job? Isn't that a dandy? Wait now, I'll try it on." He removed his belt and blouse and put on the coat. "Jove! That looks fine!" he exulted, adjusting the small mirror on the bureau so as to get the best effect. "Now the cap. By Jove, they'll open their eyes. The horn goes this way. I found one at last. A man in Coblenz had one. The German officers used to hunt a lot here. There!"

The general panted a little in putting on his horn, for he had to sling it around his neck. It was a real hunting horn, made in a great circle, so that it could be slung over the shoulder, but as the general was a little inclined to stomach, it was a rather snug fit. The lieutenant viewed the display of coat, cap and horn without comment. If he opened his mouth he would laugh, and a laugh meant ruin.

"That poem about the stag has been running through my head all day," said the general, twisting to see the effect in the mirror, "but I can't remember much beyond the fact that the stag had drunk his fill. I've thought of a little more. Something about his 'leafy couch had pressed, and shaken the dewdrops from his antlered crest.' He's got antlers, hasn't he? Jove, I wish I had the time to go out and see him. By the way, the provost marshal was in here this morning with a complaint about some one running without lights and what else, but I told him he'd get a ticket home if he interfered with my car. I won't have any —— militiaman bedeviling my household, what? Tomorrow at nine o'clock. The hunt's up, the hunt's up, tata-tata-tata! A stag at eve had drunk his fill and by gad we'll run him off his legs! And I'll toot the horn. Well, have the car here at two. We're going to inspect the area."

When the limousine deposited the aide-de-camp at the door of his quarters, the officer laid his hand upon the chauffeur's sleeve.

"Come in a minute, Corporal," said the officer, "there's a soldier in here I'd like to have you meet, an old friend of ours."

"A soldier?" gasped the corporal, getting out of the machine, "what's his name?"

"Private Stock."

The two entered the officer's room and the officer produced his friend from under the bed.

"Corporal," said he, "I thought the occasion merited a little celebration. The general is pleased as pie; he nearly hugged me when I told him the stag was safe in the corral, and every time I looked at him this morning I could see his lips moving and I knew he was muttering about stags, and the hunter's horn awakes the morn, and wondering how he was going to look in his new green coat. And every time I looked at him I was glad we had the old stag under our hand. When you get old, you know, you get rather light in the head, and if this hunt was a dud I think it would kill the Old Man. He's a good old man even if they do call him a fish."

The officer uncorked the bottle and set two mugs upon the table.

"What's biting you?" he demanded of the corporal, who was gazing out the window with a fixed and glassy stare. The officer stepped to the window and looked himself. Then he swung open the glass.

"Osc!" he cried angrily. "What the —— are you doing here? Come in here!"

By the time the window was closed Osc had appeared at the door of the room.

"Here!" demanded the officer. "What are you doing away from the corral?"

"I come for find shovel," said Osc stolidly.

"What the —— do you want a shovel for?"

"To bury stag!"

"*What!* Is the stag dead?"

"Yaw," said Osc.

The officer buried his face in his hands. The corporal with one swift motion seized Private Stock by the neck and stood him on his head in the air, but in close proximity to the corporal's mouth. Osc gave a gesture of impatience and stretched out his hand toward the bottle. He was just in act of taking a long draft himself when the officer looked up. The bottle abruptly changed hands again.

"This is my own fault," said the officer after a time. "If I'd resigned as I said I would, I wouldn't have had this disaster to retrieve. I tell you I don't fancy telling the Old Man his stag is dead. Come, Osc, what did he die of? What do you mean he's dead when he was as lively as a coot last night?"

"Naw," said Osc, "I get der veterinary up dere at eight o'clock this morning und he say der stag die from old age und he been dying for a couple veeks already. Vell, now all is known. Dot —— vot sold der stag he knew he vould die und no vonder he laugh. Und also he haff der old *jonkherr* from der castle come down und laugh, too. Dey all haff a good laugh. But not now. I bury stag und I go und set fire to der *schloss* und cut der t'roats." Here Osc wandered off into a sullen muttering in his own tongue.

"No wonder no one came down when we made all the noise," said the officer. "The more noise we made the more they laughed. —— German ——! Well, nothing to do now but tell the Old Cod and call the whole thing off." The officer's tones were those of utmost sadness.

"Don't do nuthin' rash!" said the corporal. "Now let's think a minute. Maybe we can find some way out. Start your thinker again, Osc, maybe we can fix it somehow."

"Oh how the —— can you fix it?" cried the officer. "The hounds and everything are already here and the —— hunt was to come off tomorrow. How the —— can you get another stag between now and nine o'clock, when we don't even know where to look?"

"There's another stag!" said the corporal, seizing the officer's arm in the intensity of the moment. "There's another stag! The iron one!"

"You can't hunt an iron stag, for —— sake!" scoffed the officer. "The dogs have to smell its tracks. How the —— can they smell the tracks an iron stag makes?"

"Listen," said the corporal. "We take this dead stag's guts and drag 'em along the ground in a bag, and just once, some time when there's a good stretch of ground, we let them see a stag, way off on a hill. That's the iron stag. When they get there the stag is sure gone. Why wouldn't he be? We'll drag them guts through woods where a guy can't see ten feet ahead and all the time they'll think they're chasin' a stag. Then they'll see the stag for just a second, against a skyline somewhere and that'll satisfy 'em."

The officer thought upon this matter long and deeply. The more he thought, the better the chance of success seemed.

"By ——," he cried, "let's do it. It's worth a try. But how are we going to get the iron stag?"

"Leave it to me," said the corporal. "I'll mobilize my old buddies the mule skinners, that would steal that statue of Kaiser Bill the First if they thought they could get a drink out of it. We'll just take the truck, go out to where the stag is an' lift it out the ground and away with it."

"Good!" cried the officer. "If this thing goes off well, I'll set that supply outfit up to a keg-party they'll never forget."

"To work," said the corporal, and taking Osc by the arm, he left the house.

SHORTLY after midnight the general's aide was awakened. The corporal stood beside the bed.

"All set," whispered the corporal. "We're goin' after the iron stag. We cut the lock on the gate with a hack-saw and run the stag into the truck on some skids. It ain't a very big stag anyway. We're all set with crowbars an' everything to pry it loose. We'll leave it in the truck out by the corral, cause it'll be too dark to put it up, an' we won't know where to put it anyway till morning."

"How are you going to lay the trail?"

"We'll lay it in the morning. We're gonna take out the cook an' he's gonna butcher the stag for us an' then we'll lay the trail by draggin' a bag o' guts. When we see a good ridge where we can get in with the truck, we'll plant the iron stag an' we'll fix ropes an' stuff to pull it over an' then we'll camouflage it with leaves so they won't see it when they ride by. The trail won't go nowhere near it anyway."

"Great!" said the lieutenant. "That's fine! I've got that gang of mule skinners detailed as helpers to place tables for the lunch and all that sort of thing, so you can use them as long as you want to. I wish I could superintend, but I'll be too busy. Now when the gang comes out, you be somewhere near the corral and tip me off in which direction the trail has been laid, so that I can see that the hounds are moved around that way without too much apparent effort. Be sure the trail is lost in a brook, so that it looks as if the stag got away. Don't have it vanish in mid-air in the middle of the woods."

"Does the general know where the corral is?" asked the corporal.

"Sure he does. He came out and looked it over twice while it was being built."

"There's no chances of his coming out to have a look at the stag early in the morning, is there?"

"I don't think so," said the officer. "No, he'll be too busy. We're having a hunt breakfast at the officers' mess that he's putting on, and he'll have enough on his mind."

"Well, see yuh in the morning." The corporal went out and the officer slept again.

The morning of the hunt was clear and cold, just enough bite to the air to make the horses lively and make a man's heart yearn for a gallop. The visiting officers walked about, rubbing their hands and looking at their mounts. The hunt breakfast had been a tremendous success, as shown by many a sparkling eye. The commanding general had gone the brigadier one better. He had not only secured hounds from France, but a carload or two of hunters to mount his guests, feeling, and rightly, that there were not enough horses of hunting calibre in the Army of Occupation to mount so many riders. The visitors were all general officers and were for the most part elderly and stout, but their aides were young and all looked forward with great joy to the hunting of the stag.

"Lieutenant," said Salt Cod to his aide, "you must ride with me. What a glorious morning. That little frog there is to be whip of this hunt—the hounds have gone out in a truck and he's to handle them on the field—but I'm to be master. This is just such a morning as the poet meant when he said, meaning the stag,

'He shook the dewdrops from his antlered crest.
At dawn the stag-hounds' echoing bay,
Resounded up the rocky way.'

That's us, you see. Well, mount up, trumpeter, sound mount! How does my coat fit? Isn't it fine? The general said I was a superb figure in it. —— the horn, though, but it has to be worn. They all wear them in the pictures. Come, let's be moving."

The general waved his hand in signal to the infantry band that had been playing all through the breakfast, and the band accordingly struck up a fox-trot, a lively piece enough, and just the right time for a trot. Now among the hunters was a rangy chestnut, who, with spread forefeet and rolling eye, had been regarding the bass-horn for some time. The chestnut's rider was a Belgian general and when he swung into the saddle the chestnut showed a disposition to retire backward through the crowd, but a little clubbing with the crop and a little spurring kept him in place. The sudden blast of music from the band was disconcerting to the chestnut, but when the terrible great brass mouth of the bass-horn began to grunt, "*umph-umph*," it was too much for the steed. His experience did not include military bands. A rear, a bound, and he was away, the general clinging to his neck with monocle and hat flying. Straight for the stables down the road he tore, leaped the gate and flung his rider into the manure pile. Numerous enlisted men retired from sight to give vent to their laughter.

"Well, one down," said the general, gathering his reins. "Accidents will happen. He's game, though, here he comes again. Hope he's not hurt."

The Belgian general appeared once more, his horse led by a soldier, who held the steed while the general mounted. There was some smothered laughter among the aides as the Belgian again took his place in ranks, but he took it in good part and laughed himself.

"A stag at eve had drunk his fill," cried Salt Cod. "Lieutenant, we've got to lead the field all the time. We've got to ride the line, as they call it, and in case our stag won't run, we'll have to club him. You know I got to thinking last night that it wasn't much fun to have a run through woods. A Russian ride gives as much excitement as that, so I sent out to the corral early this morning and left orders to have the stag taken out into the open country and turned loose where we could see him all the way. There is a gorgeous place that I had in mind, not very far out, where we'll go up and down hills, and be able to see the stag running. Then he goes to a forest on the far side, where there's a brook and the trail is lost. The truck that we detailed to bring out the tables for the luncheon will be in those woods and the men will bundle him into the truck and away. Won't that be fine. It's much better riding after a stag that you can see."

The officer made no reply. If the scene of the hunt were shifted, what would become of all his careful preparations? No trail would be laid in this new country, and there would be no hunt. The commanding general would give voice to his rage and Salt Cod would climb all over his aide's frame. The aide groaned. He should have resigned when the thing was first broached.

"I know where to lay the hounds on," whispered the general. "We pick them up shortly and a secret sign will tell me where they have turned the stag loose. They're going to turn the truck around in the road and make a circular mark with the wheels and any time after that we may pick up the scent."

The aide could have wept. Osc, the corporal and bag of guts off in the woods somewhere and the general and party hunting for a stag that had been twenty-four hours dead. Would stag hounds follow a fox, he wondered. Were there any foxes around here?

A murmur of interest broke out among the members of the hunt. The hounds were visible around the turn of the road. They were much like fox-hounds only heavier and were in charge of a velvet capped huntsman, garbed like the one who rode with the general, in a sky-blue coat with yellow facings, the uniform of a hunt near Fontainbleu, from which the hounds had been obtained.

"Toot your horn a little," directed the general, and the sergeant trumpeter accordingly gave a rendition of "Sam Was a Jew" that was lively enough. The horses pranced, the guests laughed and shouted and the hounds gave tongue. The general's aide felt like a man about to be hung. Then he espied a man in the ditch, who ran out and trotted alongside the aide's horse. It was the corporal, chauffeur to Salt Cod.

"Do you know how many different kinds of —— are loose?" whispered the lieutenant, bending down from the saddle.

"It's all right," replied the corporal. "Major Withington come out about reveille with all the dope. He come out to the corral. It's all fixed, we changed the trail an' everything is all right."

"How do you know all this?" cried the aide. "Didn't the major see there was no stag in the corral?"

"Didn't I just get back with the truck when he telephoned for the limousine? Didn't I bring him out in the general's car? Didn't I take the message into the corral and bring Osc outta his pup tent to talk to the major? He never got out the car, but took me an' Osc out an' showed us just where the hunt was to be, an' that's where we put it. It's all right."

"What's all this about?" cried the general, reining up and turning to his aide.

"The chauffeur was just asking if you'd want the car to ride back in, sir."

"I don't know. Have it out where the

luncheon is going to be anyway. Come, come, let's be going."

The corporal jumped back into the ditch again and the hunt titupped past him. The soul of the general's aide held no joy however. What if the trail *had* been laid across the new country? It was open and the hunt would be able to see for miles. What folly to have a pack of hounds tearing along with no quarry in sight for miles? And the iron stag! Supposing they had moved it away over here, set it out somewhere, and showed it for a second or two, like a row of targets for a firing problem, then snatched it out of sight, what good would that do? The field would know very well that no stag could run out of sight that soon. The whole success of the artifice depended upon the hunt being in wooded country.

"What's the matter?" asked the general sharply. "You sick? What are you groaning for? Got a hangover? You young officers drink too much!"

The lieutenant protested that he was well, but his mind refused to relinquish the thought that the iron stag might not have been removed. The gate to that *schloss* had been very strong.

"We'll put the hounds on in a moment," said the general, humming happily to himself. "We've only a little farther to go, if they follow my instructions."

The riders were by now approaching a large German estate, with a *schloss* surrounded by a stone wall. With a shock the general's aide recognized it as the place where the stag had stood on the lawn, the iron stag, the one that was to have been stolen during the night. Here was a chance to find if it was gone. The lieutenant *passaged* his horse across the road and up to the gate. The stag, of course, was gone, that he knew, but he just wanted to see how much of a hole had been left in the lawn, and if the truck had torn the place up at all. The officer leaned from the saddle and peeked through the bars of the gate. The stag was still in place on the lawn.

The officer's horse went back across the road of his own accord, for his rider's face was buried in the mane. The officer was nearer tears than he had been since his childhood. Ah, those —— drunken fools. All they thought of was liquor and *fräuleins*.

"That corporal," gritted the officer. "I'll have his stripes, by ——, and if he chauffeurs anything but a wheelbarrow for the next six months it won't be my fault. And that —— half-witted, square-headed, cross-breed Laplander, he'll take a few months' rest in the barbed wire sanatorium, too. Those ——, they never came near the place! And to tell me everything was all right."

A HORN tooted merrily. The officer looked up to see what was happening. The hounds were running about in the road sniffing excitedly, and the two huntsmen were cracking whips and looking perplexed. The hounds sniffed something, but as stags did not travel on the highway, the huntsmen did not understand the reason for the pack's activity.

"Hold up, gentlemen," cried the general, raising his crop. The field—in hunting, those that follow the hounds are called the field—came to a stop and the huntsmen began to scream and urge on the hounds. If there was a trail there the hounds must find it. They ran about and sniffed and whined and wagged their tails, but seemed to be making little progress. The general's aide watched them with disgust. Behind him in the road was the distinguished field: generals, Belgian, French and British, the two American chiefs of brigade, and the commanding general of the American Zone. There were also some minor officers among whom was the provost marshal of the American Zone and with him as his aide was the lieutenant of Military Police who had stopped the truck the night before. The general's aide thought he could detect a triumphant sneer on this man's face. Well, let him sneer; they all would have their laugh soon enough. Let these dumb hounds find the trail, providing there was one, and how long before the field would discover that they were following a drag and not a live animal? Not long. A drag hunt is not bad, but when one is invited to hunt a stag and discovers there is nothing but a sham trail to follow, the guest is liable to say unkind things. The officer ground his teeth again at the thought that not even the iron stag would be shown, to lend at least some illusion to the affair.

The hounds were beginning to throw their heads up as much as to say, "This is beyond us," and some were sitting placidly in the ditch. The huntsmen looked questioningly at the general. Should they go on, or did he want to try a little longer? The general, in his position as master, might have felt slightly embarrassed, this being his first hunt, for he had never turned hounds to, nor drawn a covert in his life, but on this occasion he knew very well what to do. He had seen the sign in the road, where a truck had turned around, and he guessed that the hounds had found where the stag had been unloaded, and undoubtedly the trail began just off the road, in that fine, park-like grove. The general indicated this grove with his crop, and the hounds were accordingly directed that way. The general and his aide rode in advance of the field, and crossed the ditch into the grove.

The general signed for the field to follow, when there was a sudden bell-like note from the leader of the pack, and the whole bunch of them was away, looking for all the world like a handful of pebbles rolling down a steep incline. Their speed was amazing. The huntsmen followed, screaming themselves black in the face from excitement, and the general giving a loud whoop of joy, spurred his horse and followed. The aide's mount, hearing the cries and thunder of the galloping field, stretched his neck and bolted, nor did the aide attempt to stop his flight. If he got a broken neck, well and good.

"Make 'em sing!" yelled the general. "Make 'em give tongue! Why the —— don't they make some noise?" The huntsmen, being French, of course could not understand him. This was just as well, for they would have had small respect for the general's hunting knowledge. Stag hounds run mute, that is, they do not make as much noise as foxhounds do, and moreover, no hound will give tongue on a red hot scent such as this pack followed. The pack, instead of running in inverted triangle formation, the leaders at the apex, and the skirters and babblers, as they are called, spreading out behind, was running in much the same formation as a charging troop, that is to say, in line, and widely spread. The lieutenant tore out a bitter curse. He had never ridden to hounds himself, but he had followed rabbits with dogs and he knew what such a formation meant. The trail was so rank that the pack could follow it with noses breast high, and some of the keener were running ten yards down wind from where the scent had been laid. A bag of intestines makes a much stronger trail than a stag's feet will leave. Among the field must be many who had hunted before and often, and that would immediately suspicion a drag unless they saw their quarry and that soon.

"Ah!" cried the general, as the trees thinned, "we're in the open. Now we'll see him! Blow like hell, trumpeter. —— this horn of mine—it's pounding me to a jelly! Here's open country, now we'll see him. Tally ho!"

The aide rode with his face lowered, letting his horse go as he would. He was waiting to hear the first murmurs of disbelief break out among the riders, and then change into smothered and disdainful laughter as they discovered the shallow artifice.

"WHOOP! Hark away! *Voilà le cerf!*" The field broke into a wild shout, the huntsmen screamed themselves hoarse and the trumpeter blew "Charge." The lieutenant looked up in bewilderment. There was a stag, sure enough, on the opposite ridge, and clearly outlined against the sky. Good for the corporal. He must have robbed some other château lawn of its treasure. Good for him. Then, as they looked, the stag disappeared from view.

"There! He's gone," the field cried to each other. "We won't see him again for a while."

"You tell 'em," thought the lieutenant.

The pace was terrific. The man that had laid the trail had done a good job according to his lights. He had laid it up hill and down dale, through muddy spots, and through every tiny grove that he came to. He had laid the trail in loops and circles and figure eights, such as he vainly conceived a stag would leave. Such a trail, had the hounds followed it, would have caused comment among the members of the field who had hunted deer, but the hounds disdained to follow the line. They cut across every circle and twist, running at top speed, and the field followed them, whooping.

The general's aide began to pluck up heart. He could quote from the classics as well as the general. "This game goeth right well," he muttered. Then it occurred to him that very soon the field must pass the place where the stag had appeared and the chance of discovery was very great. If the man who had laid the trail avoided the place where the stag had shown himself, then the field would know that they had not seen a real stag, for the hounds went nowhere near where he had appeared. On the other hand, if the trail went by where the stag had been seen, some of the field must stumble over it, for an iron stag can not be carried away over a man's shoulder.

"Here's luck," muttered the lieutenant. "Over we go and if we keep up this pace, they'll be so busy hanging on to their horses they wouldn't see the stag if he jumped up under their noses. Now I wonder where that gang swiped that second statue from."

The pace was indeed hard and furious. The fat generals were beginning to pant and perspire, an English captain had been flung into a brush heap, there were at least four loose horses galloping along, their owners far behind and waving helpless arms. The general's aide noted with disgust that the lieutenant of Military Police still kept his seat in the saddle. Well, the run wasn't over yet.

"Whoop halloooo!" suddenly howled the field, the sergeant trumpeter gave a wild series of toots and the general shouted at the top of his lungs. "There he goes, by —— and the General Staff!"

The hounds swung as one at right angles to their course and went tearing across a swampy stretch of ground. The general's aide nearly fell from his horse in his surprize, for on the far side of the swamp, galloping with head thrown back was a dark colored animal, an animal with horns that stretched along his neck, carried low to avoid catching them in the branches. The hounds, following the red hot trail with their heads in the air, had sighted their quarry as quickly as the field, and were off the trail and after the stag in the wink of an eye.

"Ride around!" cried the general. "We can't cross the swamp, ride around!"

Some of the field heard and checked their horses, others neither heard nor would have understood had they heard. They tore into the swamp at a mad gallop, showering mud right and left like bursting shell. A French officer's horse went down, and the rider took flight, landing flat on his face in sheets of muddy water. Another bogged to his horse's belly, dismounted, and going in up to his waist himself, was rescued by his aide with the loss of one boot and a great deal of dignity. The stag sailed along on the far side of the marsh and the pack after him. He disappeared in a thick growth of bushes, and then both pack and quarry were lost to sight.

" —— the swamp," cried a British officer. "They'll kill in that brush and we can't see it! They're close on him. I never saw a pack so close on a deer. Wonder what turned him back. Something in the woods over there must have frightened him. There, listen! He's at bay!"

There was a distant clamor from the pack, that suddenly changed to yelps of consternation, and then ceased entirely with an occasional howl.

"Look at that!" cried the general. A hound was seen to sail in the air as one would toss a ball.

"Gad, what a fight that must be!" cried the Britisher.

Those of the field who were not occupied in rescuing their comrades from the swamp showed the utmost excitement. Another hound appeared in the air, giving tongue as he was propelled upward and to the rear.

"Tossed!" cried the Britisher. "I'm going to see that!"

"Tally ho!" cried Salt Cod, "—— this horn, it's broken every rib I've got. Come on, Lieutenant!"

The three of them, with some more who still felt like galloping, took up the trail of the stag, riding around the edge of the soft ground. The noise of the pack stopped suddenly, and when the remnants of the field arrived at the stretch of brush, they found a very disconsolate pack licking their wounds, a dead hound, but no trace of the stag.

"Damn queer!" muttered the British general. "If he got away they ought to follow him. Never knew of hounds quitting like that before. Must be a poor breed! Let's have a look for spoor."

"Have a look, Lieutenant," directed Salt Cod. "See if you can find any track of him. I hope not. I've had enough. I haven't galloped like that since I took the field officers' course at Riley. —— horn is killing me."

The British general and the American lieutenant circled their horses in the brush, but could see no tracks. There was a trampled area, and signs of a lively fight, but that was all. The Britisher rode back and the lieutenant took one more look around before following him. A gasp escaped him, for he saw the end of a pair of horns protruding around a bush. He rode over at once. There was no body attached to the horns, the stag must have shed them in his flight. The lieutenant, bending from the saddle in stupefaction, saw that the stag had also shed something else. It was a brand new halter, and plainly stamped upon the leather were the letters "U.S."

The American general and the Britisher rode back side by side, the others following, to where the men who had come to grief in the marsh were smoking cigarets and consoling each other.

"Look at those hounds!" observed the Britisher, pointing to the discouraged pack, that crept along with lowered tails. "They know they've had a trouncing, don't they? Rotten breed, I fancy. Now in the West Country of England—"

The aide lost the rest of the conversation, but he noted the appearance of the hounds. Those hounds weren't licked, they seemed to be ashamed of themselves for some other reason.

"By ——!" thought the lieutenant, "they've got more brains than any of the men. They've been fooled and they know it and are ashamed to think they fell for it."

Undoubtedly the huntsmen were wise too, but if they were they kept their suspicions to themselves, and busied themselves in caring for the pack. After all, hadn't every one seen the stag with his own eyes?

The field mounted up after a while and proceeded in leisurely fashion to the grove where the luncheon was to be served. They discussed the hunt with animation. It had been a glorious run, a fast run, a fine gallop, and they had seen the stag. What more could a man ask? Old Salt Cod was beside himself with glee and the commanding general himself was no less pleased.

"The luck was our way," said the commanding general. "Fortune smiled on us. Wasn't it fine that we not only picked up a stag so soon, but that he gave us such a fine run and allowed us to see him so clearly?"

"Undoubtedly he was somewhat surprized," observed a British officer. "I imagine the deer aren't hunted to any extent here. You always get fine hunting in unspoiled country."

"You tell 'em," muttered the lieutenant, and with a grin.

When they arrived at the luncheon grove, and the horses had been turned over to the orderlies, the lieutenant immediately sought the general's limousine, on the seat of which he found the corporal garbed in his very best uniform, and looking as if butter would not melt in his mouth.

"How come?" said the officer without any preliminaries.

"Was it a good hunt, sir?" asked the corporal innocently.

"What are the details?" asked the officer. "Whose field glasses are those—mine? What the —— do you mean by taking my glasses?"

"Sir, Osc took 'em. Him an' me was up the road here watchin' the whole thing. Us an' the mule skinners. Boy, we had a good laugh. It looked kind of sad for a minute or two."

"How did you get back so quick?"

"Oh, we come out this morning with the car. I ain't been home at all."

"Well, spill it."

"Oh man!" grinned the corporal. "Well, after we seen you last night we mobilized the skinners and out we went. Well, sir, we hadn't got outta town before our friends in the motorcycles and sidecar come putputtin' along. I bet we took 'em all over the American Zone, but there was no shakin' 'em. We showed the order for the use of the truck, but they stuck right around. That officer that held us up the night before was there. He was ridin' this morning, too. Well, there was no gettin' a stag off a lawn with him hangin' around, so we doped out we wouldn't swipe no stag an' we went home to bed. Well, about daylight they all come out to lay the trail. I didn't come out, because there was a call for the general's car. They brought out the second cook and he butchered the stag an' then old Blake that's stable sergeant, he was goin' to ride his trottin' mule and drag the bag o' guts after him.

"So then they had a bright thought. They'd cut off the stag's horns and stick 'em on the mule's head and show the mule for a second. About this time I come out with the major to tell 'em the stag was to be turned loose somewheres else, an' Blake tells me to get the saddler an' bring him out, also a couple o' good halters, and some coat straps. So back to town with the major an' then out with the saddler, an' he sticks the horns on the mule with the halter. With us holdin' 'em up with the straps they looked keen as——. Then I went down to tell you everything was all right. So after the run was over, I changed my uniform in the back o' the car here, an' here I am, all set."

"What the —— did you chase that mule across the marsh for? If those hounds had caught him there'd have been —— to pay."

The corporal had a long laugh for himself. "We didn't chase him," said he. "We got him on the hill and stuck the horns on an' made him hold his head up. We was all down the hill outta sight. Well, the jughead didn't like those horns for a nickel and he begun to kick an' raise —— after about three seconds. Well, no one could stand up on the hill and hold him by the bridle because they'd be seen, so he was loose, d'yuh see, an' after a couple o' bucks away he goes, —— for leather. An' the hounds after him.

"We was watchin' with the glasses. Well, he run into that patch o' brush, an' the hounds caught him an' he let go with his heels an' kicked the spots off of 'em. His horns fell off an' the hounds seen he was a mule an' not a stag an' they laid off him, so he goes curvin' into the brush an' he's on his way home by now. By ——, he was a kicker. He rooted one o' them hounds for a goal from the field, I ain't kiddin' yuh." The corporal grinned and so did the officer.

"Tonight," said the lieutenant, "I pay my debt to the mule skinners."

Then the officer went back to his lunch and smiled happily as he saw the dark look of baffled rage that the lieutenant of Military Police cast at him.

That night there was a grand banquet to the visiting officers, and between speeches a number of the guests adjourned to the terrace of the headquarters building to smoke cigarets. The generals were there and the generals' aides, among whom was the American lieutenant. To him came the lieutenant of Military Police and asked for a match. The aide tendered him one.

"That stag of yours looked very much like a jackass to me this morning," remarked the Military Police officer, with triumphant sarcasm in his tones.

"Who? Oh, the stag! Well, that appearance was quite common this morning."

The M. P. ground his teeth and was about to reply, but a distant sound came from the direction of the supply company's billet. An accordion could be heard, cries, and as all the guests hearkened, the swinging chorus of a song:

"All of us drinks a gallon an' some of us drinks more.
One of us drinks a half a barrel, but he's a cargador.
Oh here's to the boys that packs the mules an'
throws the diamond hitch,
An' the man that says—"

"What's that?" cried the Military Police officer, scenting riot and tumult.

"Some stags at eve have drunk their fill," replied the lieutenant, smiling happily.

Here's an old author

L. Paul

in a new vein

ULYSSES

A TRAIN hooted off yonder where the country lane ended. Red freight-cars crawled slowly past. But Wilkins' Johnny and I did not see them. Nor did we see him, at this, his first appearance. We were too busy fighting, and the close-packed howling ring of our schoolmates blotted out alike sound of train and sight of man.

It was an old feud, and Wilkins' Johnny outweighed me by a good ten pounds, and our rules were not those laid down by the lamented Queensbury. It was, I fear, tooth and claw with us in that simple, rustic country.

We did not, therefore, see him as he came swinging along that road. He appeared to us, abruptly, as two great hands, red and freckled and unbelievably strong; hands that grasped the collars of our hickory shirts.

He shook us as one might shake two quarreling puppies, extended his long arms and dropped us in the roadside dust a good five feet apart.

"Shame on ye," said he, and, looking up at him, I knew he spoke with authority.

A great pillar of a man he was, with a craggy face and long, ropy muscles, clad in brown drill shirt, faded blue trousers, and inconceivably cracked and worn boots that held together as by a miracle.

"Shame on ye," he repeated, and at the scorn in his voice our schoolmates edged away.

That scorn, however, was not for me. It was Wilkins' Johnny who became the target.

"I seen 'em all fight," said the wanderer from far places. "I seen Sullivan himself."

We stared. Wilkins' Johnny blushed.

"Sullivan don't pick on lightweights," the great voice boomed. "I seen Corbett—"

Wilkins' Johnny began to cry.

"Corbett don't beat up kids."

Wilkins' Johnny dabbed chubby fists into his eyes and turned away.

"You're nigh a man," our tall mentor went on remorselessly. "Why, you're all of thirteen and the kid here's but ten—"

Wilkins' Johnny was a hundred yards down the road, feet pattering as he ran.

The tall man swung me up on his shoulder and strode off in the opposite direction.

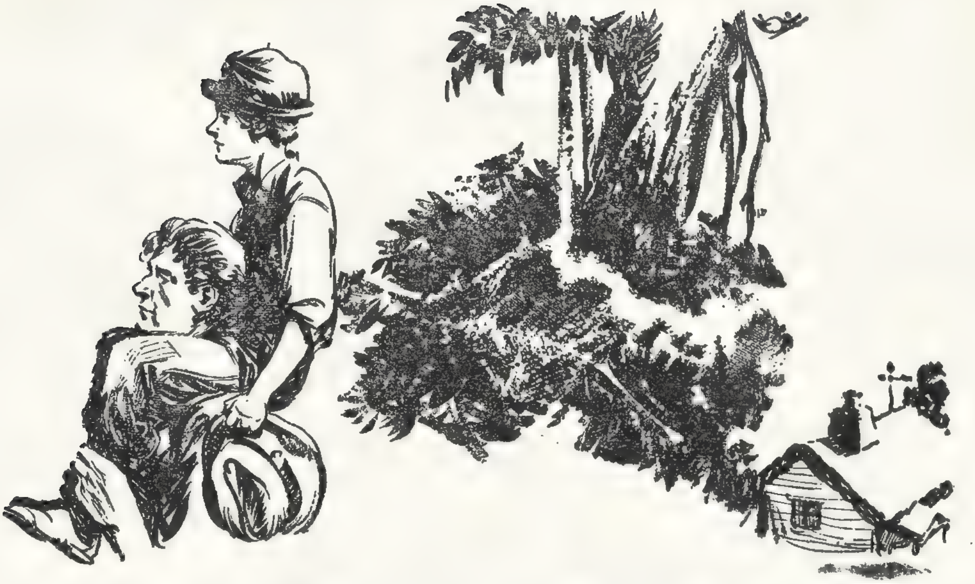
I felt a wave of elation sweeping over me. I looked back. My schoolfellows were staring goggle-eyed at this, my new champion and friend, who had seen both Sullivan and Corbett.

I was young. But I knew that from this moment I should be regarded as one apart, I, the chosen intimate of him who had walked with kings.

The tall man said nothing more. But he swung along and I rode him much as I had ridden the great farm horses.

And so we came up the long hill to the five-barred gate, and through the gate, and into the farmyard.

And in front of the stone house, on the worn bench, sat my grandfather.



My grandfather was incredibly old. In fair weather he sat on the bench before the house. Rain or winter or the chill fogs that swept in from Fundy Bay drove him to the chimney corner.

In his hand, as he sat there, he grasped a pitchfork, its three tines blunted and worn, its handle smooth and polished. My grandfather would run his hand up and down the smooth hickory handle and would turn his head slowly from side to side, pausing longest when facing the wind.

My grandfather was blind. But he loved to sit there smelling his land. He loved the feel of the worn pitchfork that would nevermore toss hay. When the weather was foul he would sit inside, as I have related, fingers stroking a broken trace of smooth leather, redolent of harness oil, that dangled from the mantel over the brick hearth.

My grandfather heard us. His blind face stopped turning from side to side. He listened as we came.

The tall man set me down.

Then stared at my grandfather for a long moment.

THAT was the year after the schoolmaster had boarded with us. During long evenings he had intoned, in the old fashioned grand manner, numberless poems.

I remembered Ulysses. Privately, I had been treasuring that kingly and provocative name for some great emergency. A straying sheep dog had almost preempted it, but now I rejoiced, for I had resisted that particular impulse.

So it was Ulysses who sat down with never a word. He placed one great red hand on grandfather's arm.

"You ain't gettin' younger, Squire," said he.

My grandfather seemed to accept him as a remembered voice, for he made no effort to touch him, to explore with sensitive fingers his person, as he was known to do with other strangers.

"I'll be eighty-four come the shakin' of the buckwheat," said my grandfather.

They talked for an hour of matters above my head. They talked as old familiars talk upon chance meeting across years I would never know, aimless wandering reminiscences. And I sat, half-listening, while the sun sank lower and the cows came in a long, staid procession from the pasture below, that errant, nameless sheep dog nipping at their miry heels.

Their voices were like music to me—my grandfather's silver treble refined by age and the low boom of Ulysses' tone. Their talk became at last but a background of pleasant sound upon which impinged the more important melodies of farm life, the tinkle of the sheep bells up the hill, the snore of the kettle in the brick-floored kitchen, the clank of the chains as the hired men let the cows loose from the milking stalls.

It was Ulysses who brought my wandering interest back.

"And—the lad's—her—might she be—"

"Mightn't," my grandfather answered.

And I knew that they were talking of my mother, and I piped up to inform the stranger that she had gone to St. John by rail.

"Such decidin' an' undecidin', as it were," my grandfather put in, somewhat proudly, as if this were a creditable thing. As for me, I blushed. A week of debate as prelude to such an astonishing and desirable expedition seemed, to me, wasted. Opportunity in my young eyes was a thing to seize on impulsively.

"Aye. 'Tis like her," said Ulysses with a grin.

"Roots an' tumbleweed is folks," said my blind grandfather oracularly. "I heard o' tumbleweed—"

"Told ye in 'eighty-three," Ulysses answered pat.

"Roots an' tumbleweed—ye interrupted me like that in 'eighty-seven," my grandfather retorted, proud of a memory that could compete with Ulysses. For this was 'ninety-eight.

"Root folks and tumbleweed folks. Aye, God made 'em so," said my grandfather, his ancient veined hand sliding up and down the worn hickory handle of the pitchfork. "Root folk we be at Inglenook Farm."

"And the world for tumbleweed folk," said Ulysses, and his eyes sought the horizon where a red sun was dropping.

"Root folks we be," my grandfather repeated. "We can not lightly up and gad as some—even to St. John." He paused. I could hear his breath, light and uneven. I could hear Ulysses' breath, deep yet hurried. Though I knew it not then, here was the crisis of drama.

"Yon oak, now, it's been there nigh two hundred year," said my grandfather, "and tumbleweed—"

"Tumbleweed can't grow roots again," Ulysses frowned. "And—"

My grandfather stared across fields he had not seen for well nigh ten years.

"There was debatin' an' decidin' for a week afore she took that train. St. John's all of forty mile away," said he at last.

"Aye," Ulysses shook his head hopelessly. "Forty mile—an' the grain fields, thousands, and this is August. The wheat—"

"Wheat's ripenin' on the south forty," my grandfather suggested. "Takes men to handle wheat. Hay is woman's work, at times—so's cattle—but wheat—"

He paused. Ulysses still stared at the red West.

"Could use a man, haply, and I'm gettin' old." My grandfather lifted the ancient pitchfork and pointed with its dull tines toward green fields slowly turning brown. "I'm not the man I was. This place needs a master wi' eyes."

For the first time since sight had vanished he now admitted his affliction.

"Wheat's ripenin'," he went on. "What's far places, after all? Ye see them, and ye tell tales on 'em. Man can sit here and talk o' far seas. Man can hug the fire and yarn o' the West. Wheat ripens here same's out there."

Ulysses groaned.

"Talk—and itch." He stretched out one great leg and stared morosely at the cracked, worn boot, still holding together at its thousandth mile as by a miracle. "Talk a spell and itch to go—and then—go," he finished, so softly that I scarce could hear him.

"This place now, a tidy farm," my grandfather went on, "and me nigh done wi' it. Such a farm wi' a stout man on it— And the wheat's ripenin' on the south forty—an' yonder tree, lad, yon oak, two hundred year it's been here. It could tell tales too. It's seen the world an' hasna' stirred to find it. It's stood there and the world's come past."

"Wheat's ripenin' south o' the border now—out West. Lads is gatherin'," said Ulysses. "Lads from Frisco an' from Texas—Scotia folk an' New Brunswickers—men ye know and I know."

"Men that come to no good, tumbleweed folk," sneered my grandfather, as one who hears again an old, distasteful tale.

"Men who ha' seen things and done things." Ulysses rose and stretched. Inside, the hired girl clattered dishes on the oilclothed top of the table. There was a hiss of hot water on pottery as she made the tea.

"South o' the line," said Ulysses, "they gather, Squire. And they work and talk. Aye, under the stars at night wi' their backs to the straw-stacks they set and talk. And it is good to hear 'em, good to talk wi' 'em, and like 'em. Good to ha' seen what they ha' seen. And they'll work north, bit by bit, till they come to the border. Then across it and into Manitoba. And they say how one day we'll harvest west clean to the Rockies and north till the snow stops us at the Arctic, for 'tis a wonderful land, yon, ay, it is, and, by ——, I ha' seen it!"

"But you have not stayed there," objected my grandfather. "You are tumbleweed. You have no roots."

"Seen it? I ha' seen it. Dod, but I have!" Ulysses triumphed. "It and other places. Texas, California, I've drifted down the old Mississippi on a flat boat. I've sailed the Seven Seas. Oh, man, man, why did the good God make so much earth? Why did he make it so dang interestin' for to see? It calls me. It calls me."

"Wheat's ripenin' on the south forty," said my grandfather with the air of a man making a last desperate offer. "An' St. John's but forty mile away and her comin' back tomorrow morn."

"Wheat's ripe a'ready south o' the border," Ulysses returned. "West's callin'. There's roads I know and roads I've yet to know." And strode to the pump to wash his strong red hands.

We ate our supper in silence.

I WOKE at dawn in my room high up beneath the gable. I woke to hear stout boards creak as Ulysses, boots in hand, came to stare down at me in the dawn's gray light. Something boyish was in his face this morning, something half-shamed, half-defiant.

I sat up in bed. Together we stared out through the window where swallows wheeled in the first slanting light of a new sun over fields still dewy. Far off showed the narrow belt of Fundy's blue, beyond the hills.

We said nothing. But I knew, knew as we looked out over that familiar landscape that one day it would no longer be my home, that one day I too would become tumbleweed. But because I was ten, I said nothing, knew not even how to formulate the impulse toward speech that surged within me.

I got up and drew on patched trousers, hickory shirt and stout boots with copper toes.

Ulysses watched and laughed. Whatever urge had brought him to my bedside at dawn, he was not a man to forget the more important conventions. He seized me roughly as I made for the door, and washed me with painful firmness, dipping the towel-end into icy water. Then together we went out through the quiet of morning to the gray road with its soft dust.

Together, with never a word, hand in hand, we started down the hill back over the road we had climbed the night before toward the steel snake that was the railroad.

A train hooted far off, then nearer. Ulysses stared at me. Then stopped and turned. Behind us, a shadow in the dawn, towered that oak tree, with its two hundred years of rooted existence. Behind us a tiny figure, doll-like in size, was settling itself on a worn bench, holding an ancient pitchfork that would never again toss hay. And ahead of us the train had stopped at the station.

A passenger, alighting, came slowly up the other road, parallel to that on which we stood.

Ulysses looked at the passenger, looked at me, and became grave.

Suddenly he let my hand drop. The train was slowly moving on, coming toward us.

He plunged a great hand into his pocket and produced something that glittered in the sun. He crammed it into my hand, and was gone, walking with resolute strides, never looking back.

The train, four box-cars and a disreputable passenger coach, swung slowly across the end of our road. The tall man, Ulysses, seemed to merge into it. I caught the gleam of a white face beneath the foremost box car as he swung in on the rods.

Then train and man were gone.

In my hand I held a great golden watch.

I opened its back, and found a name graven floridly with a date following it. The name was my own: the date far back beyond my childish memory, for I was but ten and the watch was twice as old.

And there came then to my ears the voice of my mother calling, calling across the morning fields from that other road so near our own.

"Lad, dear! Lad, dear! it's so good to be home!"

The Mark that Tells

By

Harvey Fergusson

IN THE living-room of Gilmore's ranch-house four men and a girl sat about a lamp while a summer storm drummed and rumbled on the mountains. The men smoked and the girl sewed and nobody said much.

It looked like any other quiet after-supper group, but it was not. The room was filled with a tension of restrained and secret emotions of which each one was differently aware.

Joe Slemp, sitting back in the corner smoking his pipe, was less a part of the situation than were the others and he understood it better than they. He watched them uneasily, and uneasily he listened to the storm, hoping it would let up.

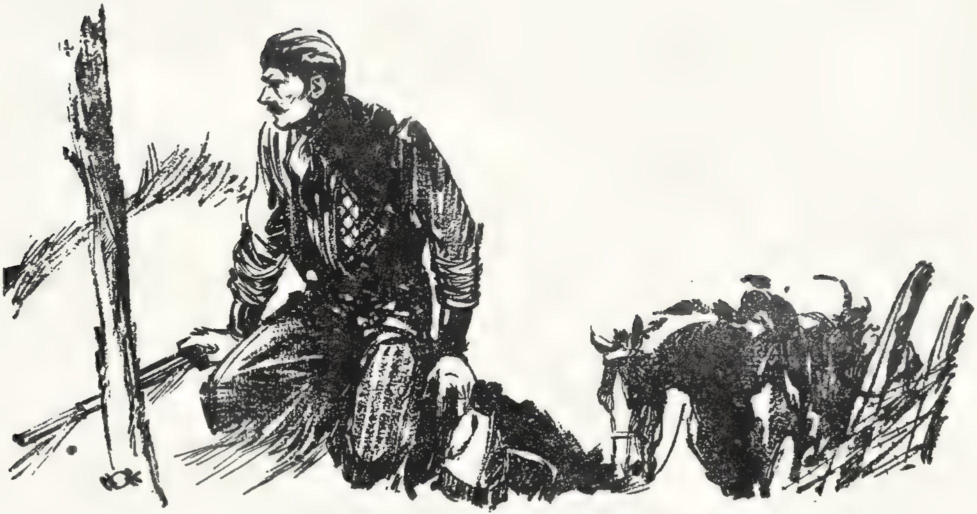
Slemp was the forest ranger in charge of this New Mexico district, seventy miles from a railroad, and in the mountains he was a power. The *gringos* regarded him with respect and the Mexicans and Indians considered him a sort of wizard. His wizardry consisted in seeing more and thinking faster than most men.

He was thinking fast now, but not to much purpose. He was trying to think of a good excuse for taking Jim Crandall away from the house before something happened. But it would be ridiculous to suggest starting out in the pouring rain. Moreover, if they did go, they would be playing right into Juan Apodaca's hands. If only Juan would go, and then he could talk to Jim Crandall and Mary Gilmore and to Old Man Gilmore, her uncle, when he sobered up. But Juan would sit there with secretive cat-like patience as long as Crandall stayed. And Gilmore, as usual, was sodden, silent drunk; slumped down in his chair, half asleep, capable of violence, perhaps, but not of sensible action.

Slemp knew nothing about Jim Crandall except what the boy had told him when he came to the ranger station three months before and applied for a job. He said he had a homestead over Estancia way, and that drought had forced him to seek employment for the summer. Slemp hired him as a fireguard, lent him a gun, which every forest officer is required to carry, and enough money to tide him over till his first pay check came.

Slemp liked this big, blond, handsome fellow of twenty-one years. Crandall was immensely good-natured and a hard worker, strong as a horse. His only fault was a temper which flared up into fighting rage on slight provocation and then died down again into humble, laughing apologies. It was that temper which worried Slemp now—that and the old .45 caliber six-shooter which hung over the back of a chair. Crandall couldn't hit a barn door with it. He had demonstrated the fact more than once. And that made things worse. The boy wouldn't stand a ghost of a chance with Juan Apodaca.

The Mexican's rifle was outside on his saddle, where he always carried it, for he



was a famous hunter. But Slemp knew that in all probability his great pearl-handled revolver hung in a shoulder holster under his left arm. That gun and the skill with which he could use it were subjects of legend in the mountains. If the boy lost his temper, Juan could use it once more and in self-defense, as he always had—

Not that Slemp really expected a fight. But he could see how a fight, if started by the boy, might serve Juan's purposes.

Slemp was guessing at those purposes to a certain extent, but he felt pretty sure that he was guessing right, for he knew a great deal about Juan Apodaca and the whole Apodaca family. They owned a large tract of wild land bordering on the forest. It was one of the few old Spanish land grants which remained in possession of a Spanish family.

In this remote place Juan Apodaca was able to maintain a feudal power, as his forebears had done. In addition to his lands he owned a store, and half the county was in debt to him. He remained, as the Apodacas had always been, a ruthless, primitive potentate.

The Apodacas had always been killers, and that was another tradition which Juan, with consummate cunning, had managed to carry on in an age when homicide was no longer fashionable. He was known to have killed three men and each time he had been acquitted on grounds of self-defense. He always forced the other man to make the first move, and his truly astounding skill with rifle and revolver did the rest.

Slemp also knew that Juan had been a regular caller at the Gilmore place for nearly two years—ever since Mary Gilmore had become the strikingly good-looking girl she was. It was common gossip that Gilmore had drunk himself deeply into debt, and that Juan Apodaca held most of his bills and notes. It was a reasonable assumption that Mary stood between her uncle and a foreclosure.

What the girl's feeling had been Slemp didn't know. Juan was a handsome Mexican, and a romantic figure in his way. He was infinitely discreet and patient when those qualities best served his interests. She might have welcomed him as a suitor once. The point was she didn't any more—not since young Jim Crandall had ridden up to the house and asked for a drink of water one day.

A far less astute observer than Slemp could not have failed to see how it stood between these two. The girl pretended to sew and Jim Crandall pretended to read a copy of the *Stockman's Record,* but every little while they traded glances and each time Slemp could see the color deepen in the girl's face—could read the meaning in her eyes.

It wasn't a thing to wonder at. Jim Crandall was twenty-two, magnetic and impetuous. The girl, Slemp thought, must be eighteen. She had heavy brown hair and brown eyes and a darkly ruddy skin that wind and sun only whipped into warmer colors. Slemp didn't know whether to call her beautiful. But as she sat there pricking her fingers with a needle, the lamplight soft on her hair and on the round strength of her bare arm and neck, stealing warm glances at her lover—well, Slemp knew how the boy felt.

He wished Crandall had taken him into his confidence more. Frank about everything else, the young man had been secretive about Mary Gilmore, which perhaps proved how deeply he was in love. Slemp only knew that he had been going to see the girl. He suspected that Gilmore had frowned on the suit, and that Crandall had met her secretly.

He had intended to break through the boy's reserve and have a talk with him about it. Then they had gone out that morning to survey a homestead line. The storm had come up and driven them, fatefully, to the Gilmore ranch for shelter. Juan was there when they arrived.

After an hour of uneasy quiet the girl rose suddenly, throwing her work aside.

"I must get those dishes done," she said. As she swept out of the room she threw a swift glance at Jim Crandall.

Crandall rustled the pages of his paper, cleared his throat.

"Gotta get a drink o' water," he muttered as he rose and followed her out. There was soft conversation, splash of dipper in water bucket. Silence.

They were in the far end of the kitchen, away from the open door, but from where he sat Slemp could see a small square mirror that hung over a wash basin. Juan Apodaca could see it too. Presently it framed a picture—a stirring picture of two young lovers meeting in a moment they had waited for long and hungrily. Her arms were about his shoulders, tense and eager, and her face was lifted to his kiss—

Slemp saw it only a second. It revealed nothing new to him. He turned from it to glance at the Mexican.

Juan had the Indian immobility of feature. He had seen—no doubt of that. He couldn't help it. He did not bat an eye or move a muscle. But Slemp saw the swarthy color of his face slowly deepen.

The picture in the mirror disappeared. There were voices and steps in the kitchen for a moment—then silence.

That silence in the kitchen seemed to fill the room where the three men sat. Even Gilmore, who had been in a stupor all evening, felt it at last. He sat up and glanced at Juan Apodaca.

In that glance, Slemp thought, he read the whole of the miserable relationship between the two. It was the cowering glance of a man who has lost his nerve and his grip at the one he fears the most.

Slemp thought the Mexican gave an almost imperceptible nod. At any rate, Gilmore rose and went toward the kitchen door with slow, hesitant steps. When he was nearly there he paused, working his fingers nervously, glanced again at Juan Apodaca.

He was a wretched figure of a man, middle-aged, broken by secret drinking, his mouth hidden under a ragged gray mustache stained with tobacco juice, his little shifty eyes heavily bloodshot.

The situation had now become plain past all mistaking. The Mexican was sending Gilmore after the girl and he was afraid to go. He was afraid of Apodaca, but he was also afraid of the hot-tempered young giant in the kitchen. He went toward the door again and again he stopped, compromised, lifted a quavering voice—

"Mary!"

A moment of silence. Then:

"All right—I'm coming!"

Gilmore, avoiding the Mexican's eye, went back to his chair and sat down. From the kitchen came low voices, as if in brief tender dispute. Then the girl appeared in the doorway, swept them all with a glance.

She was certainly, Slemp thought, in that moment a beautiful woman, radiant of color, bright-eyed, splendidly disdainful. She looked them all over a moment in silence, then took her seat and picked up her work.

Jim Crandall followed her shortly. He too was flushed and his hair tousled. His expression was one of belligerent defiance. It said as plainly as words that he was ready to fight the world for his woman.

And it was upon the Mexican that his eyes were fixed, while his great hands closed and hardened. He disregarded Gilmore completely. Slemp felt sure now that he knew Apodaca to be the real force against him. His eyes blazed a silent challenge.

Juan met his look coolly, impudently, smiling a little. Unconcerned he looked and yet dangerous as a coiled rattler.

Slemp could feel his heart pounding. If the boy said one word now there would be a cool insulting retort from the Mexican, a blow, a flash—

Slemp rose easily, casually knocking the ashes out of his pipe. He walked up to his friend, laid a hand on his arm.

"Storm's over, Jim," he remarked with a laugh. "If you've drunk enough water to hold you, we better ride for home."

Crandall's face slowly relaxed into a grin. He laughed and the girl smiled and blushed. The tension was broken, the dangerous moment passed.

Juan rose quietly, still smiling, elaborately polite.

"I must go, too," he said in Spanish. He paused at the door and bowed. "*Buenas noches, amigos.*"

He was gone, all of them looking after him in surprize. Gilmore rose and followed him out.

The girl came up to Slemp, beaming, gracious, thanking him with her eyes.

"Now you and Jim must stay all night," she insisted. "It's ten miles to your place, and the creek's up so you can't ford it in the dark, and there's plenty of room and we're gonna have buckwheat cakes for breakfast, and—"

Slemp held up a hand, laughing.

"That's enough reasons," he said.

He was not averse to staying now that Juan was gone. Gilmore wouldn't like it, but he wouldn't dare to protest.

Mary Gilmore led him to a room in the far end of the old adobe house, handed him a candle and bade him a sweet good night.

He lay awake a long time thinking. Was the trouble over or wasn't it? Juan Apodaca had missed his best chance to pick a quarrel with Crandall and had bowed himself out, as if gracefully acknowledging himself beaten. Did he?

Two things had certainly become clear to him. He knew now that Old Man Gilmore was a useless tool, even though a willing one. He couldn't control the girl and he was afraid of Crandall. He also knew that Crandall had won the girl's love. What could he do? Well, nothing perhaps, for the time being. But where an Apodaca was concerned it wouldn't do to leap at conclusions.

Gilmore was the immediate problem. He would try to keep the girl away from Crandall, because she stood between himself and ruin. But the only solution was to get the young people married and away from there as soon as possible—Gilmore would have to give in—on that decision Slemp went to sleep.

HE AWOKE when it was still dark. A light sleeper, he knew he had been awakened by a sudden noise which he could not define. The vague echo of a bang or a thud lingered in his ear, but now all was quiet for some minutes. Then he heard footsteps, a low explosive exclamation in a man's voice and a short, half-smothered scream in a woman's. He jerked on a few clothes in two minutes and hurried into the living-room.

Jim Crandall stood in the middle of the floor, his six-shooter in his right hand. Mary Gilmore was cowering against the wall, her eyes wide with terror. A bundle of her belongings, evidently gathered for flight, lay on the floor. Old Man Gilmore lay face down, near the window and in front of his chair, where he had evidently kept an all-night vigil. A pool of blood slowly widened about his head. A lamp burning low and murkily stood on the table between him and the others.

Slemp took it all in at a glance as he entered. Crandall, hearing his step, turned to face him. His expression was almost blank, as if in reaction from some great emotion. He opened his mouth to speak.

"I—we—" he began in a mumbling tone.

Slemp, who never lost his head, stepped up to the boy, seized him by the shoulder and clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Keep your mouth shut!" he commanded sharply. "They'll grill me, and anything you say now I'll have to tell 'em."

Crandall stared at him, as if only half comprehending, but he said no more.

"Now look here, Jim!" Slemp went on more quietly. "That old rotter has been shot down in his own house. You and Mary and I were the only ones in it. It's bound to look a whole lot like one of us did it. We can't afford to make a break. There's only one thing to do. I'll go up to headquarters and call Bob Connover on the service phone. He's county coroner, and his store's only eight miles from here. He can rustle a jury in no time. The quicker we have it over the better. You can tell 'em about it then. But remember this—nobody can prove who shot the old man. Now gimme your gun. You're under arrest. Take Mary to her room and then you stay in yours till I get back."

WHEN Slemp returned from his cabin he found a horse before the door. A rifle hung in a scabbard on the saddle. He recognized both the horse, a fine roan mare, and the rifle, an old .45-70 Winchester. Both were well known in the mountains as belonging to Juan Apodaca.

He met the Mexican coming out. Juan's face wore a look of deep distress.

"I come to see my friend," he exclaimed, "and I find him dead! What has happened?"

"That's what we're going to try to find out," Slemp told him shortly. "You better stick around. They'll probably want you as a witness."

CONNOVER arrived early in the afternoon, having summoned his jury to appear an hour later. He was an old man who had been in the mountains since pioneering days, and no one doubted his honesty. Having held Slemp, Crandall, Mary and the Mexican as material witnesses, he began a survey of the premises on his own account, slow and thorough.

Slemp volunteered his assistance but Connover reminded him curtly that he was under arrest.

"What you know you can tell on the stand," he said.

The house was a long, low adobe of the type common in the region. As in many of the older houses the windows were iron-barred and the walls about three feet thick. With the heavy doors locked, as they had been the night before, it would have been nearly impossible for any one to gain entrance. Nevertheless, Connover made a careful circle of the house, seeking tracks of a possible intruder.

He then examined Gilmore's body with the curious indifference of long custom. The old man had been shot clear through the head, the bullet striking the left temple and making a round clean hole on that side, a larger jagged one on the other. Gilmore's old .45-90 Winchester stood in a corner. Connover threw a shell out of it and ascertained by a test that the wound had been inflicted by a weapon of about forty-five caliber. There were no powder burns and therefore nothing to indicate how far away the murderer had stood. Neither was there anything to show whether Gilmore had pitched forward or had turned and fallen, as a man mortally hit often does.

Connover searched walls, floor and ceiling for telltale marks, but evidently in vain. He even went over the ground outside the window near which Gilmore had stood, for traces of a bullet, but came back empty-handed.

His inspection of weapons showed an empty shell in the barrel of Crandall's revolver, and Connover sniffed this like a connoisseur to judge how long ago it had been fired. He went into Mary's bundle and mercilessly ascertained that it contained most of her personal belongings.

The farther he went the more knowing he looked, but not until he searched the room in which Crandall had slept did he permit himself a smile of triumph. He picked up in a corner a note written on a sheet of wrapping paper which had evidently been forgotten by its author and had blown off the table. It was a note from Crandall to Slemp.

"Good-by, Joe," it read, "and thanks for much kindness. Me and Mary have beat it for Estancia. We ain't going to let that old whiskyhead stop us, nor waste any time arguing with him, neither."

THE hearing was held in the room where Gilmore had fallen. Crandall was put on the stand first, evidently in the hope that he would make an end of the matter by a confession of some sort.

He disappointed them completely. He admitted, in the face of overwhelming evidence, that he and Mary Gilmore had planned to run away together as soon as every one had gone to sleep. In answer to a question he said they had planned an elopement because they both knew that Gilmore was opposed to their marriage and believed that he would do anything he could to stop them.

"But you were not going to let him stop you," Connover suggested. "You said that over your signature."

"No," the boy admitted surlily. "I wasn't gonna let nobody or nothin' stop me."

"But Gilmore did try to stop you," Connover suggested, more intent on results than on correct procedure.

"No, he didn't," Crandall replied, looking at his boots.

There was a moment of silence.

"All right," Connover said wearily. "Go ahead and tell your story."

"I didn't go to bed," Crandall went on slowly. "I wrote that note and then pulled off my boots and laid down on top of the bed to wait."

"What were you waiting for?" Connover demanded.

"I was waitin' for Gilmore to put out his light and go to bed," Crandall replied. "An' he never done it."

"We know that," Connover put in impatiently. "What did you do then?"

"I went to sleep," Crandall replied simply.

Several of the jurymen laughed.

"You were about to run away with this girl you wanted so bad that nothing could stop you, and then you went to sleep?" Connover was both incredulous and impatient.

"Yes," Crandall insisted stubbornly, blushing brick-red, meeting nobody's eye. "I went to sleep—God knows I didn't want to go to sleep. I never laid awake so long in my life before. I smoked a whole sack of tobacco and pinched myself and walked around, but I ain't used to late hours and finally I just kind of dozed off—"

"All right," Connover conceded reluctantly. "You went to sleep. And then what happened?"

"Some kind of a noise waked me up. I never knew rightly what it was. You never do when you wake up that way. But I was nervous and jumpy as —— and I knew something had happened. I grabbed my gun and run into the front room and there lay the old man, jest like you seen him."

Every face in the jury was incredulous. All of them could imagine so clearly what must have happened—the two excited young lovers trying to steal out of the house, the old man drunk and violent, trying to stop them. All of them had known Gilmore, at least by reputation. They knew him for a coward subject to sudden insane rages. He had once shot a valuable horse for refusing a ford— There might well have been a fight. It might have been self-defense of a sort. But this preposterous story—

And not only was all the evidence against Crandall, but also and heavily the fact that he was a stranger. Nothing was known of his character, and in a primitive community the stranger is always suspect.

Connover spoke the minds of all of them when he fixed a severe look on Crandall and said sternly:

"Young man! For your own good you'd a —— sight better tell the truth!"

Crandall clenched his great hands nervously and turned white under his sunburn. The muscles of his face showed a brief struggle to control some emotion. Then he answered with difficulty—

"I am tellin' the truth."

Connover then asked him why he had had a gun in his hand. Crandall countered angrily.

"If you heard a rumpus in the middle of the night and went to look, wouldn't you take a gun?" he demanded.

"There was an empty shell in the barrel of your gun," Connover reminded him dryly.

"I shot at a coyote today," Crandall told him. "And I always leave an empty shell in the barrel. It's safer."

Some one laughed. Connover dismissed the witness.

Mary Gilmore's evidence was briefly given in a low voice. The quick chivalry of the Westerner prompted Connover to make it as easy as possible for her. She corroborated all Crandall had said about their affair and their intention of running away. She admitted her uncle had forbidden her to see Crandall and that they had met secretly. When asked how Gilmore had treated her, she hesitated a while and then said in a low voice—

"Pretty bad."

As to what had happened the night before she professed almost complete ignorance. Her room was in the far end of the house. She had been busy getting ready for her departure, making a good deal of noise on her own account. She had heard the shot but faintly and without knowing certainly whence the sound came. This was credible, since several thicknesses of adobe wall are very nearly sound-proof. She went to investigate.

"Go on," Connover encouraged gently. "What did you see?"

"Jim was standing there in the middle of the room with a gun in his hand and Uncle Ed lay just where you saw him. Then, right away, Mr. Slemp came in—"

When she had finished, Connover turned to Juan Apodaca.

"Do you know anything about the relations between Crandall and Gilmore?" Connover asked. "Did you ever see any evidence of hard feeling between them?"

The Mexican hesitated a moment, then nodded.

"One day about two weeks ago I came to this place," he said in his slow, heavily accented English. "Crandall was here, and he and Gilmore seemed to be having a quarrel." He paused.

"Did you hear what was said?" Connover asked.

"I only heard what Crandall said when he got on his horse to go. He yelled that out loud."

"Well, what was it?" Connover was impatient.

"He said, 'I'll come back when I get —— good and ready, and if you know what's good for you you'll keep out of my way.' "

With this Juan was excused and Crandall brought back to be asked whether he had been quoted aright.

He stood up, glowering at the jury.

"The Old Man told me never to show my face around here again," he growled. "An' I answered him something like that—I don't remember exactly what." He sat down.

Slemp was the last witness. He had sat quiet throughout the trial. During Crandall's testimony he watched the boy's face intently. Since then he had sat staring at the wall across from him, apparently taking little interest in the other witnesses.

In reply to Connover's questions he quickly told what he had seen the night before, merely corroborating what the others had said.

"Is that all?" Connover asked.

"No," Slemp replied. He walked across the room to the wall opposite the window. It was of adobe, plastered long ago and whitewashed with a gypsum mixture. Both the plaster and the whitewash were badly chipped and cracked by contact with furniture. Slemp began examining this worn surface with minute care. Connover objected.

"I went over that," he observed tartly.

"I know you did," Slemp conceded. He opened a pocket-knife and began to dig in a certain spot.

Presently, in a hush of amazement, he produced a battered bullet of large caliber.

"Here it is," he exclaimed triumphantly. "I knew it must be here. . . ."

Connover was on his feet.

"There wasn't no bullet-hole there," he protested.

"Yes there was," Slemp replied. "It was plugged up—and a neat job too."

"Was anybody in here after the murder was committed except you and Crandall?" Connover demanded.

"There was an hour, while I was gone to phone to you, when anybody could have come in—" He paused a minute.

"Juan Apodaca was here when I got back," he added. He looked thoughtfully at the Mexican. All eyes followed his. Juan Apodaca did not move a muscle of face or body.

Slemp looked at the battered missile in his hand.

"It's a rifle bullet," he observed. "Looks like a .45-70. That lets the boy out. I knew he didn't do it. He wouldn't, for one thing, and for another, he couldn't, except by accident. He's the worst shot in the world. I knew that bullet must have come from outside the house. I knew it must be here—" He paused again for a moment, looking thoughtfully out the window.

"Gilmore was sitting between the light and the window," he went on. "For a good shot, a darn good shot—he was a fair mark from across the creek there—fifty yards at most. Not many men in this county could have made that shot—maybe only one."

Another thoughtful pause, during which his eyes never left Juan Apodaca's face. Then he went on slowly, in an impersonal tone.

"There was another man that wanted to marry Mary Gilmore," he said. "And he knew Mary Gilmore wanted to marry Jim Crandall. He probably even suspected they were going to make a break for it last night. He knew Jim Crandall was here and that they had a good chance—or thought they had. He knew that if he was going to stop them he had to move quick. He might have picked a quarrel with Jim Crandall and then shot him. He had done that trick before. But if he had done it this time he would have turned the girl dead against him—

"He's slick as a pet coon—this man I'm talking about. He makes the kind of plans nobody else would ever think of. He didn't care anything about old Gilmore one way or the other. He had used him for all he was worth and found he wasn't worth much—alive. He knew that if Gilmore was found dead in his house it would be hard to prove who killed him. And he knew who was most likely to get the blame. Jim Crandall was in here and had quarreled with Gilmore and was trying to get away with the girl, and Gilmore was bound to stop him if he could. So he took a long shot, this man I'm talking about. It was a long shot in more ways than one. But it would have worked just like he hoped except for one thing—a bullet makes a mark where it stops. He tried to cover his mark but he couldn't. No matter how slick he is a man can't do a thing without leaving a mark that tells."

He paused again, still looking at Juan Apodaca, who met his eyes without a blink.

Slemp became suddenly dramatic. Crouching down before the bullet-hole he extended his arm toward the window, then straightened up and faced the jury.

"It's easy to see just about where that shot came from," he said. "The ground was wet last night. The man that killed Gilmore left *tracks!*"

The last word cracked out like a pistol shot.

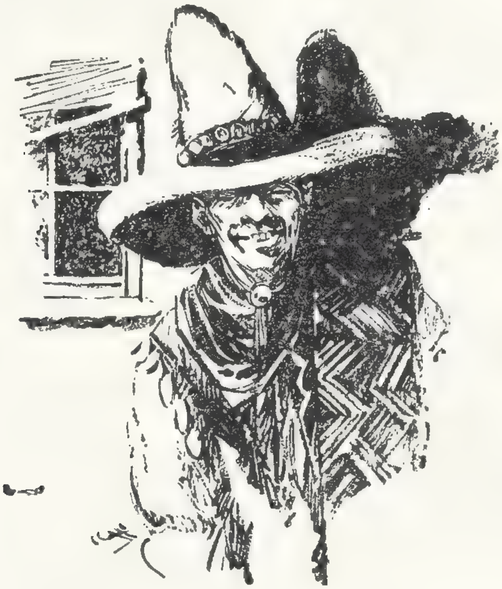
Juan Apodaca stood up and faced them all, as if he were about to speak. But he said nothing. He merely surveyed the crowd with an expression that was faintly but unmistakably contemptuous. The only eyes he did not meet were Slemp's.

Then he turned and walked, with all the dignity of an ancient hindalgo, toward the door.

Every eye followed him but his reputation stood him in good stead. There were many hidden guns among the jury and spectators, but none was drawn. Slemp, disarmed and far from the door, swept the room with angry eyes. Before he could move Jim Crandall, realizing the situation, left his seat with a bound.

"No, you don't!" he bellowed.

There was a flash of blue steel as Apodaca's hand emerged from under his coat. but Crandall was too close for gun work. He caught the Mexican's right arm and threw it up. They went down in a heap, and the .45 roared as they fell, shooting a hole in the ceiling.



TREASURE

Starting a new serial of the South Seas

by

Gordon Young

THE island of Lianfo, now called by geographers Dunham, Dunhume, or something of the kind, had a wide harbor; much of it at low tide was mud, black sandy mud, with—in places—a sparse growth of salt grass. To seaward, waves broke on patches of coral that, though some had been dynamited away for the greater safety of Lianfo shipping, menaced the harbor's mouth where tides raced in an out through the channel.

The island was rich with jungle soil into which copra plantations had been rooted. Lianfo was a copra port. The town itself was half hidden in the cool shade of palms. Sheet-iron warehouses and shanty bars were crowded out into the more bare places; this because the warehouses stank, and the seamen who at times crowded the shanties had about them an odor of sweat and of copra.

The wealthier residents, sensitive of nose, were mostly plantation owners; their families assumed a social caste and lived in large dim houses in the midst of tropically dense estates laid out on the hillsides above the town. They had little to do, these wealthy residents, but dance, gamble, dine, invite one another to dinner and talk scandal. Plantations were worked by natives and Chinese coolies, with broken-down white men, who had come out looking for romance, or fortune, as overseers. Life was soft and dull for the copra aristocracy; and its members, out of boredom, laxly ventured into flirtations with one another that even the beach loafers heard about and discussed. The steamer came once a month when it came regularly, so not hearing much of the outside world, they chattered over the small happenings in their midst.

II

THREE men were on the beach. They lay facing the dark water where the moon's reflection shimmered in a long streak that was much like the allegorical picture of the bright and narrow way that leads on to Heaven. Far off where the tide boiled on the reefs foam whitened with spectral suddenness and died away; other foam-flashes appeared and fled, endlessly, like sea-ghosts darting up from dark depths only to be instantly frightened off by the moon.

One of these men was Old Bill Barnes, bearded and talkative as a parrot, as full of repetition. He had a Bible in his sea-chest and made a curious pretense of knowing what was in the Bible. Another was Old Tom Wateman, thin, small, bandy-legged; a crabbed man with red-rimmed eyes. He dove for pearls, loved them, loved things of beauty, and was blessed by a touch of the art-gift—though the blessing was, as is usual, more like a curse in that it kept him discontented, and futilely trying with stiff

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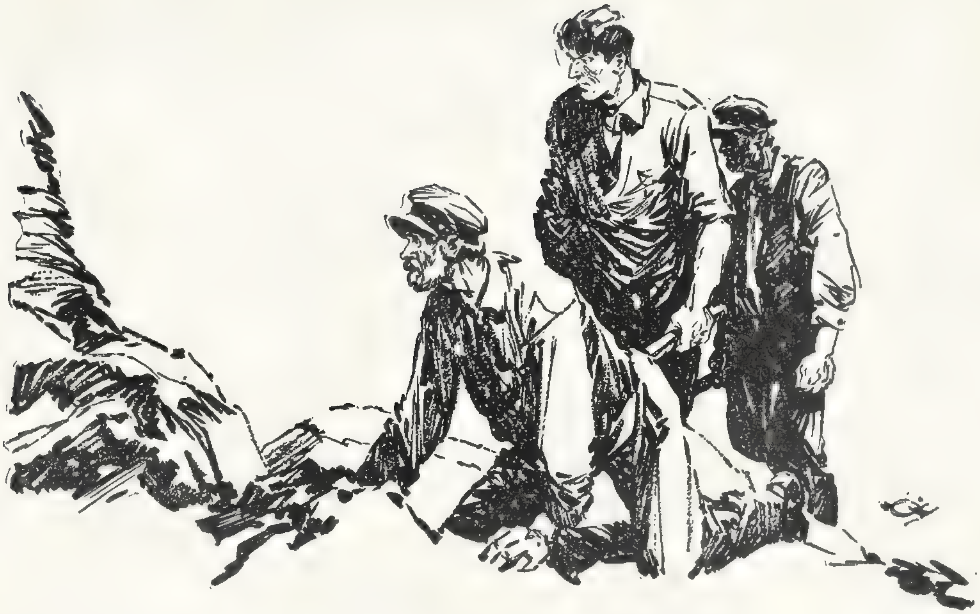


untrained fingers to steal shades of beauty from oyster shells for inlay work.

The other was a lazy young beachcomber by the name of Raeburn, Jack Raeburn. The graybeards said that he would have been an out-and-out beachcomber if left to his own laziness. They told him so; and that because they knew what was good for a boy, they and Will Heddon, who was the captain of their schooner, held him to the bondage of work. Hard work it was, and not always honest, for they poached and fought with poachers on the pearling grounds. It was hardly more than bread, tough, with weevils in it, that they got for their work and its dangers.

Barnes and Watemen were men who had given the sea their youth and manhood; in bearded old age they still served the sea. They liked the rocking of wood on water, the puff of storm winds, and the salt-spray kiss of mermaids—who on windy nights would seem to hover about the plunging bow as if to draw sailormen to a lover's death.

Old Wateman, as a diver, knew more than other men of what went on down in the sea. He believed, or tried to make out that he believed, in mermaids and that they wooed seamen. In the same way he assumed a belief in all those oddly named monsters, seen by ancient sailors and pictured on old charts as a warning for navigators. His was a faith that the more pious Barnes called "vain supperstition."

The old shellbacks were sprawled at their ease, like workmen with the right to an hour's peace. Pipes burned. A gin bottle, square of side, short of neck, passed from mouth to mouth. For a long time they had been shipmates on the *Dragon*, a black-hulled schooner on whose bows Wateman, after a heathenish fashion, had painted eyes as if she might then more easily find her way about into all sorts of forbidden coves. But now it seemed that they were to lose the *Dragon;* or rather Will Heddon was to lose her. She was his schooner, but they would feel the loss as much as he; perhaps more, for they would be sorry for him.

Hedden and his schooner were little more than sea-tramps knocking about the islands, and were frowned upon suspiciously by persons of authority, particularly by the magistrate at Lianfo.

Heddon liked looking for pearls; he did not like carrying copra or trade goods; but occasionally when luck was bad—and it was seldom good—he would turn for a time to the more reputable ways of commerce.

At such a time he once had business dealings with a man named Walscher, one of the rich men of Lianfo. Heddon had engaged to visit Walscher's traders, deliver them trade goods and pick up their copra. Of course Walscher got the best of him. Walscher got the best of everybody, or tried to. There remained the matter of some two or three hundred dollars unpaid.

Heddon never expected to get it, never meant to try unless luck tossed up the chance; then he would take, of course, a pound of flesh, two pounds.

Heddon and his men had been out again after shell and had not brought off enough to pay for the rags that tied their bleeding fingers. The little they had piled on the beach to cure had been stolen by some rascal that came into the lagoon at a time when they were out. Heddon's money sack was empty, so was the lazaret.

Curiously enough, considering how really bad their luck was, any number of people believed that Heddon knew of hidden treasure. There were all sorts of beliefs and stories about this treasure, none of them true. Heddon knew nothing of any treasure—"not even wot's in 'Eaven," said Old Barnes—but at times he would look at people and say nothing in a way that convinced them that their wrong guesses were right.

After the theft of his cured shell, to which he had no honest claim since he was poaching, there had seemed only one thing to do and that was to head for Lianfo where cargo space could always be sold to copra shippers.

Heddon, bitter with the need of money, had no more than set foot on shore before he sighted Walscher, who was just about to step into a boat on his way out to a small barque, his own, that lay in the harbor.

Walscher was a big man, a fine looking man some people thought, especially the women; but he drank much and blustered too much. Now he had some friends with him and four black boys out of the boat's crew.

Heddon, a reckless fellow, seeing who was there on the beach, jostled this man and that aside, came face to face with Walscher, and said things that would have made a thicker hide than Walscher's turn red. Walscher lost his head and poked out a fist. Heddon flattened him out, then and there.

Walscher's companions, having a careful regard for Heddon's size, and even more perhaps for the glower in his deep-set eyes, had nothing in particular to say, but busied themselves with a bottle of whisky over Walscher while Heddon went on his way, satisfied. It was some time before Walscher sat up and fingered his pocket mirror to see how he looked.

Heddon soon learned, however, that on Lianfo a rich man's flesh could not be abused. Magistrate Davies—"Porpoise Davy," Heddon called him—was Walscher's good friend. Walscher, being a business man, cast an eye at Heddon's schooner. It might have pleased, but it would not have profited him at all, to see Heddon thrown into a lousy jail. Legal matters, particularly on behalf of friends, were handled with an informal severity by the Lianfo Magistrate. In an off-hand way Porpoise Davy plastered a heavy fine, though it was called a "judgment," against the *Dragon*. Heddon's papers and compass were carried off by Walscher's agent, a neat brisk young fellow, very clever at lying, who was also a kind of third assistant to the magistrate. A watchman was put on board.

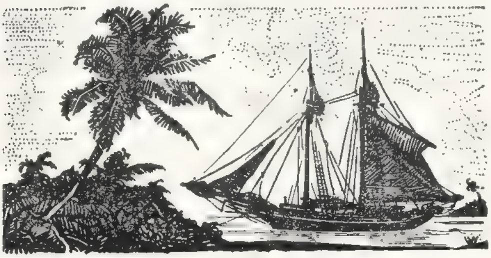
Heddon had no money and knew no way of getting any.

The *Dragon* was a battered, leaky old hulk; yet she had taken some hard pounding without leaking the worse for that. She had at one time belonged to a Missionary Society, but the odor of sanctity had long since gone from her. Others of the crew, who had been glad to hit the Lianfo beach, hated her bones. Wateman and Barnes had been on too many ships to be sentimental over one that often kept them at the pump; but they liked Heddon.

In her younger days and under a name more becoming, she had been owned by the Missionary Society, and was arranged, if not commodiously, at least arranged with rooms for many travelers. When the schooner was thought unseaworthy she was sold to a pearler, for though faith will move mountains there are persons who fear that it will not prevent drowning; and such as had owned this schooner and gone about telling natives to wear trousers and not to sing the Song of Songs in the moonlight, were too considerate to impose upon Providence by venturing longer in unsafe timbers.

A pearler bought her, and being a wicked man, did not mind a leak or two, for in the course of his dishonest life when he did worse things than poach, he had patched holes 'twixt wind and water, made by a gunboat's solid shot as he fled.

He chose Will Heddon as his mate on the *Dragon*. Sometime later this pearler was knifed in a barroom. Being a powerful man, it took him some days to die; so, having neither kith nor kin that meant so much to him as the parings from his thumb-nail, and loving Will Heddon, who the pearler said never turned his back on friend or foe or stray dog, he had called witnesses and made a will, all legal and shipshape. The pearler then went to sleep and awoke dead; that is, if the dead awaken.



NOW in the Lianfo moonlight the three of Will Heddon's friends lay on the white beach and talked. The old shellbacks were not hopeful, nor were they downhearted.

"The Lord 'E gives an 'the Lord 'E takes wot 'E wants," said Old Barnes who got pleasure out of making Tom Wateman blasphemous, and enjoyed their reproaching him.

"Blasted hypocrite, you are! Yer just as cussin' mad as me!"

" 'Is will be done," said Barnes humbly.

"I'll punch yore head, you talk more like that to me!"

"No wrath, Tom. No wrath. Oh, it's wicked, lad."

"Here, you give me up that bottle, you! You think to git me mad, then I don't notice the swigs you take. Oh, it's been worked afore. Never agin! Blast yore soul, I hate liars an' hypocrites, but I wouldn't be shipmates with a feller that was pious as you pertend!"

The talk drifted clear away from the *Dragon;* they drank and talked peaceably of many things, speaking in mumbled phrases and broken sentences filled out by a companionable understanding.

Young Raeburn hauled the talk around to the "World's Greatest Artists," for he had gone often to their show, had met and liked the fellow who was musician for the troupe. "Bunch of freaks," Heddon called them.

This nondescript group of show people had also got into some sort of mysterious difficulty with the magistrate, Porpoise Davy, a sensual, pompous old bull-head who, with high-handed assurance, gave orders and punished offenders.

But Wateman and Barnes could not keep their tongues off the Chinese pirate, T'eeay Layeen. They called him 'Say-Lean'; the name was said to mean man of iron, cruel one; literally, Iron Face. For many years he had been notorious among the many *ladrone* chiefs who, skirting the East Indies and appearing even in the Malayan labyrinth, had made trouble for the Dutch, the British and their fellow Chinamen. Search as they might, his hiding place had never been discovered. Strange stories were told of him; it was said that his marauding junks sailed to safety through what appeared to be solid rock cliffs; that on this island there was stored the fabulous treasure of ancient Chinese pirates who too had known the secret of the hidden port. Some months before, he had hoaxed the British at Sydney—about the last place where he might be expected to appear, which seemed to have been why he appeared there—then, stripped to nakedness by the treachery of an antique admiralty chart (or else his pilot bungled drunkenly) his palatial junk had struck upon a reef and he disappeared, supposedly drowned.

According to the much-mouthed story that passed as a full and true account, this is what happened: A three-masted, square-stern junk, high of poop and forecastle, with banners flying, appeared suddenly off the Sydney Heads and entered the harbor. Chinese were about as welcome in Sydney as the pest. Immigration officers hurried out, boarded her—and turned courteous. They took back with them a report that fluttered Sydney-town. Here, they said, with great display of wealth and retinue, was the brother of a royal mandarin on a tour.

He was entertained with tactful respect, and in turn entertained on his junk most splendidly.

A remarkable chap, people said; tall and dark eyed, with the look of royalty in his bearing. In other than yellow robes, people said they would have known him to be one of the dragon-blooded brood; he was at once imperious and gracious. He spoke English, if just a little slowly, at least with ease and dignity.

His visit was short, less than a week; and when he sailed, so the story went, a band on a tug with flags flying attended his junk, and a man-of-war saluted his departure with the boom of guns. Certain of the British officials, who had been none the less gracious because they had traveled far and were most suspicious of the East when there seemed nothing to be suspicious about, wondered what this visit meant but could not guess.

Some days later a trader picked up a scant handful of shivering coolies off a barren reef and brought them into Sydney. They told that the junk had been lost; that they had seen T'eeay Layeen strip himself to a girdle, thrust a knife into his girdle, heard his storm-blown shout of prayer to Kwan-Yin, Goddess of Mercy and seamen, and had seen him leap.

Why he had visited Sydney they said they did not know, having been as far removed from the pirate chief's councils as from those of the Lords of the Moon.

Sydney officials bestirred themselves searchingly, and discovered that during this short visit T'eeay Layeen had smuggled on board cannons and a supply of ammunition.

Since then his name had become a great one to be talked of on the beach of Lianfo; it was talked of on the screened side of verandas and in billiard rooms, from far-off Singapore, where the ferocious pirate had long been known by hearsay, to far-off Sydney where officials would have been glad to have his name forgotten.

His history was revived, waggling tongues repeated what was known of him and stories flew about. He, the Merciless One, had a terrible hatred of the *fan-kwei*—of foreign devils; and he had one characteristic that was not by the British considered common among the Chinese pirates, this being an audacious courage.

It was said that during the Chinese War—he being then a mere boy—his father had been executed by an English admiral by way of reprisal for some outbreak; this more by way of an object lesson to other Chinese of rank than because of merited punishment.

As even so wise and gentle a man as Confucius had said: "The sky is not broad enough to shelter both the murderer and the son of him who has been murdered." The admiral, being stationed ashore as governor, was warned by his friends who knew the Chinese better than himself, that he might as well make up his mind to leave the country; for leave it he would, either by removing himself or being removed, dead. It not being a habit among those whom the English Queen honored with her confidence to dodge danger, the old admiral stayed on and on, defiantly, even after his doctor said his liver was bad and he ought to go home.

The youth who was to become known as T'eeay Layeen, being the only son of his father, took a common name, fabricated a history that seemed suitable, turned Christian and entered a missionary school until he could speak English; with a terrible singleness of purpose he bowed to any humiliation, became a servant, washing dishes and sweeping floors, became like one coolie-born, a humble careful servant and at last penetrated into the admiral's guarded household. The admiral was found dead with steel in his heart. That the Chinese might not feel any secret, nor show any public pleasure, it was given out that the admiral had died of his liver trouble; but every effort was made to find a certain young Christian servant who had mysteriously disappeared.

The pirates scattered along coast towns and clear into the Malayan Straits were the only Chinese who then made open attacks upon the English, so T'eeay Layeen, both to escape betrayal at the hands of unfaithful friends and to appease his hatred for the white devils, joined the pirates. In a short time he got command of a ship of his own, and was soon plundering his own countrymen as readily, even more readily, for it was easier, as the English and Dutch. It was said that he was indignant at China for having made an infamously humiliating peace with the foreign devils; but as—this from the Books of Wisdom—the lucky thief can always find reasons why he should not be honest, it was likely enough that T'eeay Layeen, having been through the smoke of stink pots and washed in other men's blood, would have remained a pirate even if the British had timidly withdrawn from the East.

Stories, vague as to source, persisted regarding the hidden port which sheltered him from discovery; and about the ancient treasure stored there, enormous as the wealth in the lost cities of Genghis Khan. Rumor has a wide mouth and a drunken tongue, but like other scandalous hags usually lies about what is true, seldom chatters about what is wholly baseless. Knowing this, British men-of-war grew hoary-hulked with barnacles and sea grass, like whalers, from long prowling cruises to find whether there was any truth in this unending repetition about the secret island. But loafers and such talked mostly of the fabulous treasure, wishing luck would give it to them.

Old Barnes, Wateman and young Raeburn, since they too were credited with knowing something of treasure, and wouldn't for the world have let people learn that they didn't, talked much of T'eeay Layeen's.

III

HEDDON came toward them. He tramped heavily through the deep sand, with the lurching stride of a man that walks in soft snow; the sand was that loose and ankle-deep. He paused where they lay, towering over them, glowering down:

"Now what you —— beachcombers talking about?"

"Pirates, like you," said Raeburn.

"We," Old Barnes answered, lifting up the square-face, offering it, "are discussin' of the my-ster'ous ways of Proverdence—"

"That —— yellerbelly, Say-Lean." The words were scornful, but Old Tom's tone was one of admiration; he was conscious of racial superiority, but acknowledged merit even in a Chinaman.

"An' w'y the Lord in 'Is wisdom 'as seen fit to give a blarsted Chink more luck an' a craftier 'ead than a white man," said Barnes.

Heddon squatted cross-legged on the sand, pushed back his cap, took the bottle, drank, then:

"Not so much luck, I'd say, of the kind a man wants. The Chink had his little hour, but now he's dead and damned."

"That's jes' wot I been tellin' 'em!" said Barnes righteously. "Them as does wrong catches ——! It's in the Bible so."

"Me, I'll tell yer somethin'—" Wateman gestured for silence.

They paused, listening. He puckered his red-rimmed eyes and stared toward the moonlight, puzzled, and groped with vague thoughts and feelings that troubled his brain. Always it was hard for him to get what he meant into words—unless he was swearing. A queer little tough-bodied old man who would gape at sunsets and snap savagely if disturbed. He was always sawing up shell, seemed never to sleep and dallied endlessly with his bits of art work. Often for hours he would be as silent as if angered after he had come up out of the water. The artist in him, through the diver's glass, had seen how futile, how pitifully futile, was his own scrimshawing and inlay as compared with God's.

"Bad luck, Will Heddon, an' you Bill Barnes, it ain't dyin' however ye die. It's havin' nothin' to give you some pleasure in livin'. You, Bill Barnes, you've got a belly, an' if it's full ye're happy. Me, I got somethin' empty inside o' me that ain't ever been chock-a-block. Whisky goes toward the spot, but it ain't whisky as fills what I want. Jus' makes me forget the time bein'. So now I say, the blasted Chink, dead an' damned is he? But mates, he had his pleasure a-fingerin' gold an' silk an' jewels while he lived!"

"You're worse nor a Hinfidel!" Barnes told him.

Barnes, drinking, would grow pious; Old Tom, mouthing the same bottle, would turn heathen.

"I ain't! It's God as makes things purtty!"

"It ain't! That there is Satan's doin's. An' you'd sell that worthless soul o' yourn, Tom, would ye, f'r gold an' silk an' jewelry—them bein' Satan's bubbles?"

"Aye," Old Tom growled, stubborn.

"An' women to wear the gold an' silk, slim soft women that like you," said Raeburn.

The old shellbacks swore at him. Barnes said, " 'E 'ad bad morals, was corruptin'."

Heddon, powerful of arm, reached over without anger or effort and rubbed the boy's head down into the sand.

The shellbacks were modest men who blushed under their beards to hear talk of slim girls; and Heddon, toward women, had a wounded man's scorn for those who had wounded him unfairly.

Heddon stood above six feet, was wide of shoulders and heavy of fists; he hated the islands, natives, climate, but loved the sea, and the wild tricky life of an island dodger. He had a white man's scornful arrogance toward all other races, and most men of his own; he drank hard liquor and he would fight. As the son of a prominent family in Washington, D. C., he had been trained for the diplomatic service; he had ruined his career and become an outcast through slapping the face of an ambassador's attaché—

all over a woman who he discovered too late was the one who should have been slapped.

"That yellerbelly," Old Tom went on slowly, his face screwed into odd wrinkles from the labor of trying to get his thoughts into words, "he stole from Dutchmen an' such as there ain't no great harm in doin' if you don't git caught by 'em. But ever'body called him pirit. Walscher here, he robs white men, like us. An' Walscher, he's what Will Heddon here calls a piller o' church an' state. If he was Chink, he'd be pirit. Seein' as how he's British, he's a piller."

" 'Ere! I'm British!" said Barnes, growing dignified.

"You're hypocrite!"

"You're British yourself, Tom," Heddon told him.

"I ain't. I'm Irish, thank God!"

"Me," said Old Barnes solemnly, "leanin' on the parypits of 'Eaven, mug in 'and, I'll look down an' say, 'Pore Tom, as was shipmates with me onct. I tried, but 'e wouldn't listen!' "

"Shut up, you hypocrite. Heddon here's jus' back from a talk with the agent. I want to hear what now. What's he say, Will?"

"The agent," said Heddon, pausing to empty the square-face and toss it away, "he's not a bad fellow for an out-and-out liar, but a bigger fool than most over the word 'treasure'."

Walscher's agent, a small man with a thin alert face, spoke with a jerk rapidity and had said:

"See here, Captain. I've got to keep butter on my bread, and Walscher's a good thing for me. I'm sharp enough to watch out for him, as you have to do to get on. But now you can settle with him. You know you can. I'll help you."

"Settle, how? I've no money."

"Oh, the ——!" said the agent, laying a confidential finger against Heddon's arm. "You've been hit with a whopping sum, I'll say, for blacking a man's eye. But in business there's always a way out. Now see here, you've got the name of knowing where some treasure's hid and—"

Heddon gazed at him, half tempted to try what that treasure yarn might do, then growled truthfully—

"Started by accident, kept up as a joke—that treasure talk."

The little agent gave a quick wink and smiled knowingly, then waved his hand as if to brush aside what Heddon had said:

"Joke, eh? Well what of it, Captain? That's all right. What'll you do for me if I show you a way out?"

"When I have no money and don't know of treasure?"

"Yes. Listen!" This with fall of voice and eager rapidity, "Just organize a company—I'll talk it up—sell shares in your treasure venture. There's twenty men or more here—you've been talked of the —— of a lot more than you know—that'll go fifty pounds, some better, if you'll just come out and say you do know where that treasure is, and want to get outfitted an' go on the search. Understand? How about it, now?"

"I know of no treasure."

"No? Well then, what of it? People think so. They'll go in on shares to back you to look for it. No trouble at all to raise the money. Lots of talk about you. You've been talked of no end."

"You're a fool or think I am," Heddon told him, scowling. "If I knew of treasure, why wouldn't I go after it, find it, keep it? Why sell shares?"

"Why haven't you gone after it?" the agent asked, looking wise.

"Don't know of any, I told you."

"Now, now, Captain," said the agent, putting both hands on Heddon's arm. "Supposing it was on a wild island, over the Solomon way? Eh? Take a big party of fighting men to get it off, eh? You'd think a long time, wouldn't you, before risking a crew big enough to get after it, wouldn't you? Crew might claim the lion's share, eh? But with shares it could be arranged safely. You'd have money to hire men you trusted. Think it over, Captain, I'll go in. I'll put some money in. I'll talk it up. Of course you'll give me a split out of your share."

"You believe it yourself, do you?"

"I'll take a sporting chance. Either way, Captain, it'll be good business for you. You'll get some money out of it."

"Then I lose my ship. To —— with that sort o' business."

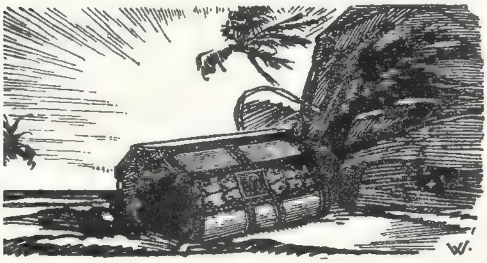
The agent's nervous hand moved up and closed on Heddon's shoulder:

"Then you do know, but are not letting anybody in for a share. I believe you can raise the money any time you want. The *Dragon's* hardly worth it. That's why you're holding off. Thinking it over, eh? Am I right?"

Heddon laughed at him, and the agent laughed too, nervously, still convinced.

Now Heddon had brought back word to his friends:

"We've got forty-eight hours to raise the money. Then she's to be sold—which means that Walscher gets her. I can stand the loss easier than I can stand the feeling that Walscher and Porpoise Davy will be pleased with themselves. I'd like to do a little something to make 'em wish they'd never heard of me."



THE treasure talk about Heddon had been started by accident.

Once he got the schooner half loaded with gold lip and went clear to Singapore for a market. When he came back he had some ancient gold coins in his sack, some with the stamp of the old Dutch East India Company.

In Lianfo he paid out a few of these for supplies, and the chandler was inquisitive.

"Oh," said Heddon, "I dug 'em up where they were —— hard to come by. But plenty more are there against the time I get a proper shipload to go for them."

"Where's that, you say?"

"Huhn, I didn't say. Would you tell if you knew where a bit of gold was hid? But it's a long way from here, an' you have to deal with a pack of savages that'll skin you alive. I just got off with these and a little more."

Heddon, having tormented the chandler's curiosity, would have thought no more of it; but within an hour people began to greet him cordially, urging him to drink; people who had known him aloofly were amiable, said he was looking well, would he have a drink and dinner? When they eased the talk into questions of where had he been and what had he found, Heddon grew mysterious.

At the first twinkling of what was in peoples' minds, Old Barnes talked freely. He said that while he and Heddon, with some blacks out of the crew, were ashore looking for water on an uncharted island—treasure islands have a way of being uncharted—they had stumbled upon a cave by a spring where there were chests and scattered coin. Savages attacked them. He had been wounded in the leg; and he and Heddon had barely got off with their lives, and no more gold than could be crammed into a pocket hurriedly. They were going back after it as soon as they could get a crew they trusted; but the crew might be more dangerous than the savages, and it would take a a big crew, for there was a swarm of savages.

Who doubted, uh? Barnes rolled up his trouser's leg and showed the wound scar. Bothered him bad, his leg did. At times he rubbed it vigorously; usually after a question that needed a thoughtful reply.

Men guessed wisely in thinking that Heddon, if he did know of treasure on a savage island where there was to be fighting, would have hesitated to get a crew; for any crew picked up down there in those days would have been dangerously likely to run off with ship and gold. Some of the elders scattered about the beaches were gray, bowed, wicked men who had known the hulks and yellow jacket, had still odd scars about the ankles where leg-irons once gnawed; and the island ports were strewn with runaway sailors and wanderers who followed the ocean currents like driftwood, and lay about the beaches like driftwood stranded between tides. Not all were a hard, tough lot; some were soft and flabby, moistened to rottenness by mildew and gin.

IV

WATEMAN and Barnes now began to use bad language as they scratched about in the sand looking for their last bottle of gin.

"Like two ol' turtles makin' ready to lay eggs," said Raeburn.

Thereupon Heddon put his hand to the back of the boy's neck, pressed, said:

"You hid it, Son. Dig! I'm thirsty myself."

Raeburn pulled the bottle out of the sand. Barnes snatched for it wrathfully; said:

"Blarsted larrikin! I 'ope yer die o' thirst on a grog shop thres'old! Steal from a nice ol' man like me."

Again cross-legged in a group, they passed the bottle, smoked and talked; but talk was only of the *Dragon*.

Barnes, the pious, pulled at his gray beard and nodded sagely as he urged Heddon to squirm through by selling shares in a treasure hunt.

"—mebbe ol' Porpoise Davy an' Walscher 'isself 'll buy some," he suggested temptingly; and he gave as a precedent 'ow the Lord 'ad favored Jacob in scupperin' of Esau.

"Me," said Old Tom angrily, "I'm f'r goin' aboard an' heavin' that agent's watchman over the side. Then take 'er out! There's no smoke-stack in the harbor, an' the *Dragon* can show 'er heels to these copra stink-pots. What you say, Heddon?"

"To try it at night from where she lies now we'd go on a mud bank. To try it in daylight we'd land in jail. Jack—" Heddon put a hand half kindly at the back of the boy's neck and shook him—"what's your plan?"

"That you set Old Bill there to prayin'. Miracles help."

"No blarsphemy, young un! I've prayed in my time an' been 'eard. Lads ain't like they was in my day. Now they grow up hinfidels. Tut, tut, tut!"

"Better 'n hypocrites, like you," said Old Tom. "An' me, now I'll tell ye. All of ye! We git the *Dragon* out o' here or I scuttle 'er. You hear me?"

"Come times, Tom, come times," said Barnes, shaking his aged head, "when it 'pears right to do wrong. An' if a bloomin' hangel don't come with a sack o' gold, w'y I'll take it for a sign, an' we'll scuttle 'er. I'll 'elp you, lad!"

Then the old shellbacks, both half drunk, reached out gropingly and shook hands.

CHAPTER II

VIOUX

THE musician for the theatrical troupe, or rather small handful of sideshow freaks that were preposterously called artists—and the World's Greatest at that—was an indolent yellowish fellow, yellowish from opium, who went by the made-up name of Denasso.

The next day, during the afternoon, he sauntered with a quite idle air up to where young Raeburn lay on the grass in the shade, and sat down as if he, too, had come for nothing more than to watch the native girls at their mat weaving; but after a lazy silence he asked where Captain Heddon could be found.

"What you want of him?"

"I have a message."

"What is it?"

"It is for him," said Denasso smiling.

His was a gentle, rather attractive smile, though his teeth had been discolored by the opium pipe. His skin was dark as old parchment, his body thin from the pain of poppy pleasure.

They got up and together walked out from town and down along the beach to Grogan's shanty. Raeburn called Heddon outside and Denasso spoke confidently, though in a listless sort of way, saying:

"Vioux"—Vioux was the manager of the Artists—"would like a private word with you, Captain. Somewhere where you won't be much noticed talking together. The magistrate's got an eye on him. On you too, I hear."

"What's he after?"

"Business, I'd guess. It's always business with Vioux. Clever man, Captain. Not so clever as Madame, perhaps, but—" Denasso shrugged his shoulders.

"What's he after?" Heddon repeated, looking hard at the frail musician, looking with hard disfavor at the opium stain on his skin.

"He can tell you, Captain. I don't know. It's important, or at least he's excited. He thought it would be better if you two could get off somewhere by yourselves. What may I tell him?"

"That I'm here, and he can come if he wants. There's a back room, or here's the beach. But if he's got anything to sell, tell him to stay away."

Denasso bowed and went off, indolently unconcerned.

Heddon and Raeburn went inside, put their elbows on the bar and asked for gin; then, though Grogan was present, Heddon spoke to Mrs. Grogan, asking if it would be all right to use the back room for an hour's talk.

Grogan, himself a man of the sea in his younger days, or so he said, though he would have said anything to draw trade, drew sailormen. He was a bit sloppy with fat. Mrs. Grogan was lank, bony of face, with red hair pulled back and skewered into a tight knot. Some said that she would skin a flea for hide and tallow; anyhow, she had a name for skinning sailors.

But to Heddon she said heartily:

"Shur-r-r-re an' ye can be in the back room f'r an hour or two ov them to-night, Cap'n. Be afther makin' yezself to home. Though to me own moind, Cap'n, 'tis divil ov bad company ye'll be in, wid the likes ov this Jack Raeburn here an' thot monkey man ov a Frenchy! Oi been to his show. Indaycent, Oi call it wid nayked wimen an' thot big nayked Turk wid hair all over 'im. Grogan there, he went twict bayfore Oi wint to see why. Oi saw all right. He don't go no more, or Oi'll go afther 'im. Nayked wimen an' shnakes!"

Mrs. Grogan liked Will Heddon, said he was a "rale gentleman." Grogan, heavy of jowls and puffed of belly, did not like him.

When Heddon was gone, though Raeburn remained, Grogan told his wife that there was a wide white beach where such rale gentlemen might sit apart and talk, without using the best of the shanty's space at its most crowded hour.

One angry word set off another, explosively; then, when she threw a beer bottle, Grogan knew that it was time to get out; so out he went to that broad white beach where a gentleman might sit at his leisure, and meditate.

When Raeburn left the shanty, Grogan, in an attitude of sour brooding, sat some distance off and called. Raeburn went near, squatted down, and listened to his growling. The boy knew very well that Grogan would soon bring up mention of Heddon's treasure. He always did.

"Bad luck go wid 'im to ——!" said Grogan, as if good luck might ever attend the hurtling hellward plunge of a man. "Now ye're a foine bhoy, Jack. How the divil can ye stand to be always near a man loike thot Heddon?"

"Well, make a guess. Can't you?"

He nodded, gave a long wink, said:

"Oi can. But are ye shure ov it, thot threasure? An' why don't ye make him dig it up?"

"Make him? A fine mess you'd let yourself in for, trying to make him do anything!"

Grogan fumbled about for his pipe, then:

"Oh, Oi don't know about thot. Iver'thing can be done if a man knows how. An' what's he to do about his schooner there?"

Grogan pointed to where the schooner lay, pulling like a dog at a leash, as if furtively trying to slip her cable and follow the tide.

"Grogan, listen. I'll tell you something. There are men right here on the island, rich men, that want to fit him out for a share in that treasure. He's turned them aside. He's not splitting with anybody. And it's my guess that he'll get his schooner off all right, an' maybe the very next trip go after that treasure!"

"Ye mean it, Jack? 'Ow but Oi'd loike to give 'im the crew thot he takes out wid 'im!"

"Should be on board yourself, Grogan."

He gave Raeburn a quick, surprized glance, then half guiltily dropped his eyes and prodded the bowl of his pipe with a forefinger. Presently he said, "Threasure!" and moistened his lips. Then Grogan grunted a time or two, and thoughtfully drew little marks in the sand with a matchstick, all the while glancing from the corners of his eyes, doubtful but tempted to speak of something. At last he said—

"Bhoy, Oi know a way to make him dig ut up!"

"You do! Let's have it. I surely don't!"

"Oi do f'r shure. Ye know Pelew?"

The man known as Pelew was a turbulent bully, not a beachcomber but a sailor, said to be a good one and willing enough to sign on; but being a born trouble-maker, none of the traders or copra skippers would have him on board.

"Pelew," said Grogan, "is a lad wid faults, but we've talked it over, me an' him. An' maybe Oi'll be afther havin' a talk wid ye, Jack, jes' me an' you, sometoime soon."

He stared at Raeburn as if trying to read on his face how far he was to be trusted; but remaining doubtful, shook his head and said—

"The toime will come, Jack. Maybe soon."

Grogan, being used to quarrels with his wife, knew just about how long to wait before his help at her side behind the bar would be acceptable. After a while he got up, dusted off the sand, and trudged across to the low broad shanty, where men soon began to gather for the evening.

After night came on and the barroom grew crowded, a Swede with a sobbing accordion was near to making sailormen—some of them fellows that smelt of copra, some of them pearlers and used to a stench beside which copra and bilge were mild—

mournfully remember their sins, the childhood home, perhaps some blue-eyed fair one, never to be seen again.

Mrs. Grogan's voice rose abruptly, clear and sharp:

"Belay thot church piece an' be afther givin' us somethin' wid a jig in it! Hear me, ye —— squarehead!"

There were growls and grunts of approval, for sailormen have enough troubles without remembering, as sad music has a way of making them remember, lost pleasures and soured sins.

"Somethin' with a jig in it, aye! An' show you like it, you lubbers, or I'll put y' flat aback an' stern-on!" bawled the hard-handed, brawny fellow known as Pelew, who had a way of throwing out wild threats, but unlike most noisy-mouthed men he would fight at the snap of a finger. One little fellow or a roomful of big ones, it was all the same to Pelew when he was angered.

II

WILL HEDDON and the boy Raeburn were at a table in the back room with Monsieur Vioux; and Vioux, as usual, was attended by a negro, that juggler among the freaks. The fellow juggled knives, but Denasso smiled in a lazy mysterious way, as if there was some joke about it, when any one spoke of Zudag's knives.

Vioux was a showman on the stage and off; and in Lianfo this negro, wearing black baggy trousers and a red tasseled sash, was always at Vioux's heels like a more substantial shadow than most men had, and of course made people wonder and talk.

Vioux, a small dapper Frenchman with an ugly cast of eye, would never look about for the negro or at him. Vioux simply spoke as if speaking into the air. The black man was supposed to catch the words. This was merely another of the showman's tricks. It gave him the bearing of a potentate who had at least one slave.

But now, facing Will Heddon, the Frenchman did not have much the air of a potentate; it was more that of an angry suppliant. He repeated himself excitedly, tossed his hands—small shapely hands they were—and now nearly weeping, now flashing his eyes and spluttering foreign oaths, now clapping hands to table, he would threaten to rise and go; then as if giving of his heart's blood he would offer a little more money and swear anguishedly that this was all he had or could get; and would say—

"The good God He knows, monsieur, this time, this time I do speak truth, monsieur!"

And all this while Will Heddon leaned forward on his elbows, glowering above a half smile and saying nothing more than could be said by a slight shake of the head. Heddon waited, just waited inexorably, until the anxious Frenchman gave up enough of what seemed precious as heart's blood to make it worth while to agree to the dangerous bargain of stealing the Chinese dance-girl Po-Shu from the very house of old Porpoise Davy, magistrate.

The prayers of such a prayerful scapegrace as Bill Barnes, who claimed they had often been 'eard, had not perhaps been of the quality to draw a full-fledged angel out of the sky with a sack of gold to save the *Dragon;* but Vioux, though there was nothing angelic about him—in fact that wily cross-eyed cast of his would have made a simpleton distrustful—would have to serve.

Vioux swore that he did not have the money, but his oaths were in vain. Perhaps he didn't have the money. He said not; but he would have to find it, somehow—though he said he couldn't. Heddon made him believe that unless the money was paid down he would go straight from Grogan's shanty to Magistrate Davies and tell of what Vioux was planning.

Heddon wouldn't have done that at all; but how was an excited Frenchman to know?

VIOUX had a small bulbous body, and black mustache tips that were waxed upward to a needle's point, with a chin's tuft of black beard as if daubed on by sticking plaster.

Who he was, Lianfo did not know, or why he had appeared and distributed badly inked handbills that spoke of his freaks as artists.

"Calling 'em the world's greatest," said Heddon when he first learned of them, "is not more absurd than calling 'em artists at all. Bah! Artists are madmen that drink their own blood, an' try to do what only God has done—create!"

Heddon's own brain was streaked with madness, or so some persons thought, for he had a way at times of saying wild things, like that, which no one understood.

Vioux had given out that he and his Artists were touring the islands; but with half an eye any one could see that he wasn't the sort of fool to hope to make much money out of bundling his freaks from the deck of one trader to another, and presenting them in the old warehouses of beach towns.

Vioux was himself a performer, being something of a magician with coins and cards; and though he could pull gold coins from the noses of men it was more difficult to get the coins out of their pockets, unless he got into a card game before his identity was known; then, such was the harsh unreasonableness of those island men, he might be required to return what he had won. Life, everywhere, is hard on artists.

In the troupe was one Abdul, the Human Bull, a so-called Turk with a German accent; strong man, strongest man in the world, greatest wrestler in the world. There was no moderation in Vioux's vocabulary. The Human Bull would appear in a motionless Herculean pose, a mangy goatskin over his naked shoulders, a belt studded with brass and tin polished to look like gold and silver about his huge belly, and he would lean for a time on a long knotted club that men might gaze upon him. He had a massive body, ponderous, bulging with muscles; he tossed weights, labelled into the hundreds of pounds as boys might toss coconuts, only more sluggishly, for much that stood out on Abdul was merely fat. The weights were falsely labelled, but this to save baggage charges. Abdul was almost as powerful as Vioux claimed, but was simple-minded. He was as hairy, as a dog, and though professionally a Turk, drank huge quantities of beer.

There were two women among the Artists; and one appeared on the smeared handbills as Mademoiselle Lucille, Queen of Eden. Something like beauty at times showed on her face and at times disappeared; this varying expression lay deeper than rouge and powder, and one who looked at her closely would be likely to suspect that she was cruel. Her most womanly distinction was her wealth of black hair, which she wore in braided coils, and she carried her head proudly as if crowned. Some said that the hair was undoubtedly dyed, that she was older than its blackness indicated. Though billed as Mademoiselle she was spoken of among the troupe, and addressed, as Madame. Just why she was billed as the Queen of Eden no one knew, unless this obliquely hinted that had Eve been such a woman the serpent would not have brought the curse of sweat and toil and pain upon mankind, for Madame was a snake charmer.

"My Babee," "You, poh—!" This to Abdul—"Strong man, eh? So! MyBabee," "as she called the snake," "one leetle word an' my Babee make of you jellee! Strong man? Oh, poh!"

At night she stood behind the row of lanterns, or candles in cans cut away for reflectors, and staggered under the coils of a python that, with most of its length still in the large green box that was daubed along the corners with red, almost concealed her spangled body. She had a trick that made hard men shiver, for, not every night but often, she would place that thing's head close to her cheek and somehow get it to open its mouth, and at times its tongue flickered like a flame about her pale face.

Madame was fascinating to young Raeburn, and he had questioned Denasso. The musician, with a lazy stare at nothing, replied indifferently:

"Just a show woman. All her life been a snake charmer—and worse. How worse? Oh, well, anything for money. Very clever woman, Madame."

His smile, usually like that of a lotus-eater, well fed, became for a moment sneeringly bitter, self-embittered. Madame provided opium; and having that, what else mattered? He could have broken away from her, not from the habit; so where she went, he went, and what she said, he did.

Madame, he said, owned the show. Had been born in her father's mountebank-wagon. Denasso had traveled with her in England, in Germany, as well as France. Madame was not lucky, but, ah! resourceful. Moody woman, at times gay, at times sullen, but always careful of her appearance. Her head—how could the head of any one who loved a snake be sound?—bubbled with strange schemes. And she had the daring to try them. Nothing of the coward about Madame. Would do anything for money. Ferociously greedy. Always scheming wildly. When the wild schemes brought money, the money went into diamonds. That too showed her head was not sound, for they were her unlucky stones. Could never keep them; would lose them, have them stolen, or need of money would make her sell. A fortune teller had told her that diamonds would always bring her misfortune, she having been born with the planet Neptune in the sign of Leo—"Whatever," said Denasso, "that means. But Madame laughed at the silly nonsense. Yet they have made trouble for her. There's Vioux, it was through diamonds he got sent—"

He stopped, and for a moment sat moodily, like a man who feels he has talked too much.

"This Vioux?" Raeburn had insisted.

"Oh," he replied evasively, feeling perhaps that too much had already been said, "her brother, or something. Manager. He was our manager in Paris before—something happened, something to do with diamonds. I don't know just what. I never pay attention to anything."

"An' that little Chink girl, what of her?"

"Oh, Po-Shu?" Denasso's smile brightened. "Madame found her in Sydney. How or where, I don't know. Really don't. It doesn't matter. Lovely child, Po-Shu—isn't she?"

Po-Shu was a strange girl, and seemed hardly more than a child; she was said to be an Eurasian who had been trained to entertain Orientals. She had a lithe body and an odd young face, with dark eyes. Her eyes had the almond slant that seemed to give her an inscrutible peephole so that she appeared to look upon the world with a kind of fatalistic indifference or serenity, as if she did not know that she was a sort of captive among the Artists; or knowing, did not care. She did care, greatly, for she had an intense fear of Madame, who watched her as a cat watches a crippled mouse.

If Vioux was asked about this Chinese dancing girl, he would say glibly:

"My daughter, Monsieurs, by my firs' wife. Ah, a marveelous woman, my firs' wife!"

"Daughter, ——!" was the usual comment.

But Vioux would reply with a mere shrug that effortlessly shed the insult.

For the men who had slipped and slid down the curving surface of the earth from northern latitudes, Po-Shu seemed to possess a bewitching mystery.

"It's in the Bible about 'er," said old Barnes, stroking his beard solemnly. " 'Er lips they drip 'oney and 'er mouth it is slicker than hoil. She's Chink, an' Solermon 'isself onct 'ad a Chink girl fetched to Jewruselem, but she don't live long, the climit bein' too chill an' foggy."

"Why didn't he send for another then?" asked Raeburn, derisively.

The old graybeard spit tobacco, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, said "Ouch!" and rubbed his leg thoughtfully; then he spoke of storms to sea, said young uns in his day didn't doubt their elders. He bade Raeburn read the Bible, offering the loan of his.

" 'Tis all there, like I say," he grumbled, frowning authoritatively.

The Bible being a large and unfamiliar book, it was easier to accept, though doubtfully, what the old fellow said than turn to a passage that proved him wrong; and the pious rascal knew it.

Heddon, with brutal indifference, had said of Po-Shu:

"Slave girl, trained for some rich man's harem. They go in for that sort of thing in the Orient as in England they go in for race horses."

And regarding Vioux, Heddon had made the guess:

"Swindler or forger—both and much else, I'd say. Don't dare go back to France, probably because he left Caledonia too soon."

New Caledonia was a French penal colony; escape was difficult but could often be arranged if one had a friend outside with a little money.

"—an' that snake-woman's —— resourceful. You can tell it by the look in her eyes," said Heddon.

However they had got hold of Po-Shu, neither Madame nor Vioux had been resourceful enough to keep her.

Lianfo was cluttered with Chinese, there being many merchants because there were many coolies employed on plantations. And as such heathens do, they huddled together of nights in stuffy ill-smelling rooms with vague lights and talked a shrill sing-song that, not being intelligible to good Christians, or bad ones either, had the sound of nonsense if not of devil-worship.

The Chinese had been somewhat agitated by Po-Shu's presence; there were those among them who recognized her as a slave girl of great value, a priceless jewel if properly marketed, but out of place in the unappreciative hands of foreign devils.

One of these was a merchant called Hoopla, this being the Saxon's careless contraction of his honorable name. He had a pendulous, forward-reaching neck, and a shaven head, bald like a vulture's but for the queue; and he seemed to gather such stuff as only vultures or Chinks would have, sending out boats that brought in shark fins and sea slugs.

Hoopla, taking with him a fat, squatty, yellow stranger, had gone to Magistrate Davies. In broken English Hoopla told that Po-Shu was a Chinese Christian who had been stolen by wicked men from a Hongkong mission and sold; that this squat, yellow friend, a newcomer to Lianfo—who now said nothing as if he did not know a word of even pidgin English—was a relative who had searched for Po-Shu. The thinnest strain of Chinese blood, though it trickle through forty families, is yet blood-relation.

Said Hoopla:

"You catchee littee Po-Shu, eh? She plopa talkee hin yeung-ki. Her shpeakee all-samee me talkee. You bettee! Makee shuttee, eh?"

Porpoise Davy in his usual high-handed way summoned Vioux and Po-Shu to appear.

The Chinamen were present, standing as aloof as yellow images.

Though Po-Shu had been watched closely by Madame and Vioux, it was likely that the Chinks in some way had previously communicated with her; and they must have known, or suspected, that Vioux was in no position to give a straight account of himself.

Vioux, questioned by the magistrate, lied fluently. Po-Shu was half white, the daughter of a woman who had formerly been with the troupe; and little Po-Shu's mother, dying, had charged him to look after the girl as after his own child. He called the good God to bear witness that every hour since then he had been faithful to his sacred trust.

The willow-waisted Po-Shu, who spoke a daintily accented English, when questioned, also lied. She said it was true that Vioux had bought her from men who had stolen her from the mission. And yes, the squat yellow man was her honorable uncle, known of old; a worthy man, blessed with a kind heart.

Vioux screeched abusively at her, but the porcelain face remained innocently inexpressive; and the magistrate, severely, invited Vioux to explain his own presence in the South Seas, to tell from where he had come and why.

Vioux melted into apologies for loss of temper, but insisted that he had spoken the truth; said that he was a showman worthily, and without proper appreciation, trying to entertain the residents of island towns. Humbly he showed a willingness to kiss the hand that threatened to throw him into jail. Better to lose Po-Shu, who was worth a fortune to an adroit man, than go back to New Caledonia, which was like Hell without the preparatory easement of death.

Porpoise Davy rubbed his paunch and chewed a cigar, reflectively. It had been easy to convince him that Po-Shu should be taken from Vioux; not so easy to persuade him to hand her over to a squat yellow uncle, friend of the vulturine Hoopla.

He would, he said, keep her in his own house, protectively; and in due time take steps to return her to the Hongkong mission from which she came.

Thus the yellow men had robbed Vioux without enriching themselves.

Vioux was desperate. Much of his desperation was due to Madame's wrath. She gave him the choice of recovering Po-Shu or of being returned to New Caledonia.

In his desperation if he had not sought out Will Heddon he would have failed to approach the one man who, from all reports, seemed most likely to undertake, and, having undertaken, to go through with the abduction of Po-Shu.

III

"MONSIEUR, monsieur! I can not pay so much!" Vioux begged. "Demand of me my head—" he placed his slim neat hands to either side of his head as if to unscrew and offer it—"I geef you that as easy, oh, monsieur!"

"You're too deep in to back out, Vioux," said Heddon. "If I don't get the money, the magistrate will get your head."

"But oh, monsieur, have some leetle reason! What can not be paid can not be paid. I can not pay!"

"The magistrate is rich and generous, Vioux. It may be the old codger will let my schooner off, and pay something too. Anyhow, it'll put me in his high good favor—an' you in jail!"

"But she is mine, monsieur! I swear it!"

"By theft or barter, Vioux? How much did you pay, or how steal her?"

Vioux swore with much feeling. His tufted chin waggled, and the needle-pointed mustache darted inflectionally, like a flourish of tiny daggers.

Heddon understood French well enough to know that Vioux cursed him, but kept his face blankly scowling; Vioux might call him all the names known to a Parisian scoundrel who had been tutored at New Caledonia, but pay he must the *Dragon's* ransom.

"Ah, monsieur"—he was begging again—"what I can, that I will pay. But what you demand, I can not! Half, monsieur, one leetle half of what you demand of me, an' then I will be naked. Stripped to my skin, monsieur! Have mercy, I beg of you!"

"These are tropic seas. Nakedness won't hurt you. Being a magician, you can pry loose money from the Devil's fist. Out with it, Vioux, or the bargaining's off, and I go to sell my news to Porpoise Davy. Anyhow, I'd rather help him guard the girl than you steal her. Steal her, an' I'll probably lose my head. You want to make Saigon, you say. Pay the money, and I'll do my best to get you there, you and all your freaks. For the last time, how about it, Vioux?"

"But Monsieur, you mus' listen! When one has not the money one has not the money an' can not pay!"

"I'm neither Jew, Scotch nor Chink, to get fun out of haggling. Three times now you've sworn you had not another cent, then raised your offer. Come to my price! Yes or no, and the next word ends it!"

It was Heddon who now put hands to table, pushed back his chair and half arose, repeating—

"Yes or no, Vioux?"

Vioux made a sound like a tearless sob, as if choking. He glared at Raeburn but without noticing the boy. "Monsieur, I can not—" He broke off, for Heddon, as if such further talk ended the bargaining, stood up, put a hand on Raeburn's shoulder, said: "Come along, Jack, we'll go up and have a talk with Davy!"

"Oh, monsieur! No, monsieur— Oh, jus' a moment, monsieur!"

Vioux sat for a moment stiffly upright, with forearms flat before him on the table and gazed fixedly at nothing, with his black eyes in a sort of cataleptic stare. Then he spoke swiftly in what seemed to young Raeburn a kind of gibberish, as if, like a true and soul-damned magician, he did take counsel of invisible devils. A pause, a moment's silence, then it seemed that an invisible devil answered in that same gibberish, briefly. It was merely the negro Zudag speaking from the shadows behind Vioux. Not many words, they came with a clattering rush, then silence.

Vioux, with an actor's tragic air, now leaned forward, pulled at his hair, groaned, said weakly:

"I will pay, monsieur! My heart, it is my ver' heart I lay in your hands! Oh!"

Heddon smiled grimly as Vioux held his abject pose for a minute, sighing over and over as if to touch Heddon's hard heart, but there was no sign of mercy.

Vioux fumbled at his waistband and drew out a small chamois bag. He gazed at it, hesitating. With more sad head shakes and sighs, he took from the bag one glittering stone. He crushed the empty bag in his hand, held it for a moment, then with an exasperated gesture threw the bag down on the table.

He held the stone cupped in his palm and gazed at it, sighing noisily, waggling his head as if dizzy; then with slow movement he laid his hand, palm up, out on the table, and said sadly:

"Take heem, monsieur. It is the las' of a great fortune—ah, all goes to the ——! All is gone. This is yours, monsieur. It is more than you have asked, but it is all I have!"

Heddon bent forward but did not touch the stone. It looked like a true gem. Heddon spoke respectfully, for the diamond was large:

"Vioux, I am no diamond merchant. If this is not what it looks like, it is no use to me. If it is a diamond, I'd say you're right—it's more than my price. Anyhow, you sell it. Bring me what I've asked for, an' I'll go through with what I've promised—or try to!"

"Monsieur, I can not sell this. Bad men whisper evil things of me, all lies! But I would be suspect'. Arrest'. I would have my diamond stole from me as I have los' Po-Shu—lying devil-girl that she is! Do not sell heem, monsieur! You mus' not, I beg of you! Keep heem, an' soon I will pay you back. It is my luck-stone, an'—"

He put the diamond on the table, drew away his hand, gazed at it, shook his head; then looked hard at Heddon with those black eyes that had an evil cast.

Heddon picked up the diamond, turning it over and over. As if this was more than he could endure to watch, Vioux got up hurriedly.

"Monsieur, before your God, you swear you will keep the promise?"

Heddon with a scowling grin said, "Not before God, I won't. No. I swear it before the Devil—it's his job to help us!"

Vioux trembled, suspecting this man mocked him; but, whether robbed or not, he was helpless. He stood irresolute, then, making the only appeal left to one who is helpless, said:

"You are an' hones' man, monsieur. That I know. I go. But if you fool me—ah!"

No threat seemed suitable. He made none, but after a long uneasy pause suddenly went out the back way, followed by his noiseless negro.

Heddon looked at Raeburn, and smiling grimly asked—

"Is it good luck, Jack, or bad, we've tumbled into?"

"Bad," Raeburn told him. "We are not lucky men."

"A wise answer. When we started the talk, I was eager to get the money out of him. That schooner's home to us. But now I see we're in for a —— of a risk. If we get off without getting hung, we'll be lucky men!"

"But when he spoke as he did, Will, an' that nigger answered—that gave me a chill. I'd sleep better tonight if I knew what they said between 'em."

"Then sleep, for I'll tell you. Vioux begged the nigger not to mention to Madame anything about a diamond. I couldn't catch it all, for if anybody wants me to understand French these days it will have to be spoken pretty slow. But there was something about Vioux having taken it out of Madame's snake box—which means that the cross-eyed scoundrel stole it from under the nose of her python. He's —— dishonest to dare such a risk! Anything that blasted snake guards, I'd let alone. I can tell you this much, Vioux's more afraid of her than of her snake. But I'd like for you to tell me how the —— I'm going to handle this?" He held the diamond between finger and thumb, gazing at it, admiring yet doubtful.

"How do you mean, Will?"

"Who's to buy it? Or how am I to explain having it? A pearl—I could say I found it. People don't find diamonds. They steal 'em! And if I show this thing, the old Porpoise is likely to grab it—like he did that girl—and say to me: 'Explain!' But I'll go through with it somehow. I wonder how?"

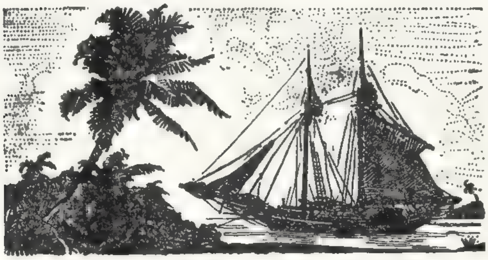
"Yet that Vioux's got money. Some. He showed you that. Enough anyhow to buy a passage on a trader an' get off Lianfo. Why, can you say, will he pay a price like this—" Raeburn poked a finger at the stone—"for a girl like that Po-Shu?"

"No, Jack, I don't know all the evil plans that the Devil might put into the head of a scoundrel like Vioux when there's a woman tangled in 'em. But she's a slave girl, lad; and slave girls are bought and sold in that part of the world Vioux's so anxious to get to. They always have been, and always will be sold in the Orient. I don't know anything about slave-market prices; but my guess is that Vioux thinks some idiot of a prince would give a handful of gems like this for a bit of yellow porcelain like her. So it looks like we've turned slavers, Jack. How do you feel about it?"

"Me? I'd guess that any woman's as well off in the harem of an idiot prince as under the protection of Porpoise Davy!"

"Aye! A good rascally argument to make us feel we're doing right! There's some bad things I'll do, an' some I won't—though I don't know of any good reason why I shouldn't do 'em all, having done so many. If the *Dragon* stays above water, I'll get Vioux and his freaks to Saigon and dump 'em on shore. There my promise ends. An' if he's up to what I think, he'll lose that girl if I have to break his neck to make him do it! The Lord knows I don't want her, or care about her. But white, black or yellow, may God strike me dead if ever I help any man to market a girl's flesh. That's one thing—no!"

He filled a pint tin cup half full of gin and drank as a thirsty man drinks water.



EARLY the next morning Heddon pounded the thick bottom of an empty gin bottle on a piece of scrap iron, and, having got what he wanted, went to the agent's house.

The agent was breakfasting alone in pajamas on the veranda. He, as usual, welcomed Heddon cheerfully. A perky disposition and studied shrewdness caused the agent to be pleasant with every one. He arose briskly, moved a chair, asked Heddon to sit down and have coffee anyhow.

Heddon refused the coffee but sat down. He filled the chair, his straight wide shoulders rose above the chair's back.

"Lord, but you're a big brute," said the agent, admiringly. "An' you look pleased. What's happened? Good news, I bet. Goin' to let some of us have a crack at shares?"

"Now about the *Dragon*. Will you take a pledge for more than the debt?"

"Your promise to pay, you mean? Now, now, Captain, be a good fellow an' don't put me in a hole. Your word, I'll take it. Sure, of course! But when a man makes a promise he pledges the help of what gods there be, and gods are tricky. I believe in you, your word—but I'm an infidel!"

"Sound head you've got," said Heddon. "You want a crack at treasure. I'll give you a nibble. Have a look at this."

Heddon, as he spoke, took out the chamois bag. There was now more size to what the bag held than if an ounce of peas had been poured into it. He upturned the bag and carefully shook upon his broad palm what looked very much to the Agent, now out of his chair and leaning forward across the table, like diamonds.

Hedden thoughtfully selected the largest, closed his palm, secreting the others, and reaching over laid the stone on the table cloth under the agent's nose. Then Heddon carefully returned to the chamois bag those fragments of glass which he had discriminatingly chosen from among the chips of the smashed gin bottle.

"Why, why this is a diamond!" the agent blurted, greedily fingering the stone, but more greedily gazing at the bag. "You're rich! You've—there was treasure. An' you've got it already!"

"Oh, no—no," said Heddon, but with a rather satisfied air. "All this—" he held up the bag, jiggling it a little—"isn't much by the side of what I haven't got. But it serves present needs."

"I should think it would!" The agent swore nervously. He held the diamond in his palm, turning it over, and raised it to the sunlight. "Let's see the others, Heddon!"

"That's enough. More than enough and the best I've got. How about leaving it as a pledge until I get money?"

"No, no, that wouldn't do. Still—here, see here, Heddon," said the agent, holding up the back of his hand and showing a ring set with a stone of fair size. "I've a diamond. Know something of diamonds. Let me see the others. You don't mean to give this to Walscher, do you?"

"Pay him off and hold it yourself. What I want is the schooner, and some stores. If you can arrange credit for me—there's the diamond. It'll more than cover everything."

"Let me see the other stones, Heddon."

"No, that's the best. I've got to have supplies, and you settle with Walscher any way you like. I've got no ready money, and don't want to go about showing stones. I've been talked of enough already. Too much, as you know."

"But you didn't fool me, Heddon. I knew you had that treasure, didn't I?"

"You give me something to show I've made payment. I want my schooner."

"But tell me about it. My Lord, Heddon, this is exciting — treasure — a real treasure story! Tell me about it, won't you, Heddon?"

"Some other time, the whole story and straight truth. It'll interest you."

"Tell me now. I'll not breathe a word!"

"Not now." Heddon's answer was final.

THE little agent was a shrewd man, but evidently he did not get the better of Walscher in the handling of the stone, for before the day was over he talked openly about the "big diamond," said Heddon had a bag full of them, and had merely dipped into the bag and drawn out one. According to the agent, Heddon had said there were more yet, that he hadn't even scratched the treasure cache.

The story ran from tongue to tongue, and grew nearly as large as a tale out of Arabia.

Barnes, Tom Wateman and Raeburn, from every side, were invited to drink, and questioned temptingly.

Wateman got sourly drunk; Barnes became warm and expansive. He hauled up his trousers leg to show the old wound received on the island at the time he and Heddon had stumbled on the treasure. Said it was he who had found the cave, he who had saved Heddon's life at the risk of his own. They had got off, he said, with but the little they could stuff into their pockets from what lay scattered about the cave. Chests, a dozen of them, remained; great oaken chests, bound with brass. The drunker he got the more there were of the chests. Skull and crossbones were painted on them. The wound in his leg had, he said, gone into rheumatism. He compared his pain to Job's. Suffered greatly, but wasn't one to complain.

Men who bought drinks, hoping to hear of Heddon's treasure, presently had to listen to wrangling over Heaven's.

"It's all mine by wot's right," said Barnes, solemnly drunk. "But hearthly treasures, they ain't wot I labor f'r. We're told as 'ow to lay 'em up in 'Eaven!"

He stroked his patriarchal beard and gazed piously overhead at cobwebbed rafters.

Wateman demanded:

"But what if yer foot slips an' ye skitter into Hell? Ye lose, don't ye, what heavenly treasures as ye've sweated for?"

"Don't be blarsphemous, Tom."

"An' that there scar on yer leg, I bet ye got it, drunk, from fallin' down a hatch!"

" 'E's henv'ous," said Barnes to those who stood near. "That time we got back to the ship off the hiland, me bein' wounded severe—'im there, 'e 'ad to rub my laig an' bring me grub. 'Eddon was that partycular of my care. Now Tom, ye know since 'Eddon 'isself has give hout about the treasure, there ain't no huse f'r you to make like you don't know 'bout it."

"What ye kickin' my shins for?" demanded Tom, batting his red-rimmed eyes.

"To put you in mind o' the punishment as comes to liars in 'Ell!" said Barnes. "Now Tom, wasn't I bad 'urt that time."

"You was, Bill. But most of it was from bein' so bad scairt."

"I wasn't. Jack 'ere'll bear me hout!"

"You git any drunker, an' me an' Jack here'll both bear ye out—feet first!"

"You're henv'ous. I got more gray 'airs nor you, an' 'Eddon respects 'em."

IV

HEDDON respected neither gray hairs nor the great bodily weariness that they all felt when it came to getting supplies on board. He had taken four sailors off the beach; and when the supplies were stored, he raised anchor and had the boat's crew tow the schooner with the tide out into the harbor. He could not anchor in the channel, where the tide's current was swift and deep, and the bottom poor for holding. The current was tricky at times. Two ships had struck in daylight even after some of the coral had been dynamited.

Every one who knew the harbor soundings knew also that the *Dragon* would have to go out at high tide, or thereabout, because of the sand bank that the current had built up along the channel.

The anchor went down in seven fathoms and was no sooner down than Heddon, watching the sky, growled:

"You're the seventh son of a prophet, Jack, saying we're not lucky men. She's clouding up, an' we need all of that big fat moon to get out of here. But then lightning will serve if there's enough of it."

"My laig is 'urtin' somethin' orful, Will," said Barnes. "An' seein' as 'ow it was wounded a-savin' of you in our treasure cave, it'd be no more'n right for to let me go 'shore for some linyment."

"We'll be ashore tonight. Now you stay on board to receive guests!"

The guests were Vioux and his troupe.

Abdul, the German, in a fez and needing a shave, came with all of his weights on a shoulder in one box. Their labeled weight was near two thousand pounds; but at that, another man could hardly have lifted the box.

Old Tom, who was merely a bandy-legged bantam, and usually short tempered as an old bantam, gazed admiringly at the huge hulk of a man.

Abdul looked up and down the deck, grunted, put down his box, sat on it, took out a cigaret and asked Tom for a match; and when Tom gave it, Abdul asked—

"You der cabtin?"

"No, son, I ain't. If I was, I'd make you bosun. You come nearer havin' the proper build f'r a bosun than ary man I ever saw!"

Abdul may not have understood what was meant, but it sounded like a compliment, and he grinned, pleased. Abdul's likes and dislikes were simple-minded and stubborn.

"Big as Gerliath!" said Barnes. "I 'ope 'e's good natured."

Denasso had drum and fiddle, and a long slim box containing his opium layout under his arm. Zudag carried bundles. Native boatmen helped sling luggage on board. Vioux carried nothing but an ivory headed cane. He was dapper and nervous. Getting near Heddon, he whispered quickly:

"Please, Monsieur, do not let Madame know the nature of the arrangement between us. She is so ver' easy to grow excitable."

Vioux, with much bowing, introduced Madame; and she gave Heddon a long look as if taking his measure before her lips flashed a pleasant enough greeting.

Madame was not young, but her fine black hair gave her a youthful distinction; she was trim, held her head high, and had the ease of one that had traveled much amid all kinds of inconveniences, and did not mind.

Show women, the sort that knocked about the Australian ports, and sometimes ventured farther, were usually frumps, either fat or skinny slovens. Madame was shapely and neat. The first impression that she was amiable—and, because of her accent, almost cute—was not to be trusted.

The green box, daubed along the edges with red, was put on deck upside down. She flew to it. Her eyes flashed, her tongue rattled at old Barnes, who drew away from it in alarm as it dawned upon him that this box held that snake. She demanded that he take hold of it again, right it. Not much he wouldn't. He said so wrathfully.

Vioux bestirred himself, and helped to get the box righted. She bent over, with her face almost against the wire window in the lid, over which there was a sliding shutter that could be closed; she spoke as if explaining and apologizing. Her voice was vivaciously affectionate.

"Blarsted 'eathen!" said old Barnes, indignant.

She heard him and straightened quickly. He glared stubbornly into her black eyes.

"Ah, so? Ze serpent is wise, monsieur! If I say to heem, 'I do not like zat ugly ol' man wiz the dirtee beard,' he know who I mean, an' some time catch you—so! while you sleep."

She interlocked her arms in a quick writhing movement, suggestive of a snake's embrace.

Old Barnes dropped his eyes and stamped off, swearing vaguely with much feeling, and Madame looked after him, her head tilted and eyes flashing in amusement.

V

LEARNING that Vioux's troupe had gone on board Heddon's schooner, Lianfo became fretful and mystified.

It was reported that Grogan had said he knew all about what was up. Persons, itchingly curious, came that night to the shanty bar and asked for Grogan to learn what he knew, but could not find him.

Mrs. Grogan snappishly replied:

"—him an' thot wild man frum Barneo, Paylew, wint off togither afther sundown. I hope thot niver agin may Oi lay oies on oither ov 'em!"

If her wish was sincere it was fortunate, for it came true.

CHAPTER III

PORPOISE DAVY

MAGISTRATE DAVIES, owning a fine plantation and enjoying good food, had grown large of purse and body. Friends behind his back playfully called him Buddha, he was that fat and solemn and he liked, too, much the same sort of kowtowing that is given before Buddha's images. He rarely visited the plantation, but lived in the midst of a pleasant estate near the town.

It was his habit to doze over old newspapers on the veranda in the cool of the evening, often into the faint chill of the night, after his wife had retired and the servants were on their mats—if not off to some forbidden night-festival that the magistrate and missionaries suspected of being old savage rites.

The night was clouded with the threat of rain; even the creaking insects, like thoughtful musicians careful of their cymbals and fiddles, lay nearly quiet, not stirring out, as if they knew this night that serenaders would get wet; but fireflies drifted through the foliage, and their bright twinkling was like the winking eyes of harmless little devils that prowled mischievously—such harmless little devils as were not at all alarmed by a sprinkling of Heaven's holy water. A few bats noiselessly cut the darkness, swift and soundless as the shadow of phantoms; the air itself was motionless, and every leaf seemed to wait in a kind of motionless expectancy for the wind-gust that would scatter rain.

Porpoise Davy, alone on the veranda, with a robe over his legs, his large nearly bald head thrown back with mouth slightly open, dozed contentedly. The shaded lamp on the table beside his long cane chair threw a glow warm and yellow, like sunlight, upon him. His arm hung down beside his chair, and below his extended hand lay a newspaper. The magistrate had fallen into dreams.

Out in the darkness there was a faint scraping of awkward footsteps, clumsily stealthy; then the slow movement of vague forms at the outer edge of the lamp's glow. A tall, broad figure tramped heavily in a flower bed, reached up, grasped the veranda rail, rose, and stepped across.

A hand tapped the magistrate's shoulder, and the magistrate, confused by the sudden awakening, blinked up at Will Heddon's face.

Then the others, now careless of the noise they made or of flower beds, began to scramble over the rail, old Barnes and Old Tom, Denasso and young Raeburn.

The magistrate lurched bulkily, sitting upright, and glared. He was startled, a little confused, much outraged, not unlike a mud Buddha shocked into life by mortal irreverence. Heddon had long been known to him unfavorably as a fellow with a high hand and impudent speech; and magistrates, no less than majesties, suspect the unhumble of being dangerously evil men.

The magistrate, always breathless if excited, puffed wrathfully:

"Here, here, what you doin' here? All you men, here!"

"Your pardon if we intrude," said Heddon derisively, looking as if ready to grab and fling back the magistrate should he try to bolt.

Davy had no thought of bolting. He seemed to regard dignity as a part of his dress; perhaps too he knew that without his dignity he would be as unimpressive as without his trousers.

"Intrude, sir! You—you trespass, an' shall hear of it! Off with you, all you scoundrels!"

Heddon's dark face brightened with a grin:

"Since when, your Honor, have you ceased to want scoundrels to stand and face you? Now we have business—"

"Business! What business this time o' night? At my house—you come like thieves, sir!"

True. And the old shellbacks were villains by their faces. A life of toil often gives such an aspect to men who stand suspected in the eyes of magistrates. Heddon, when he glowered, would make anybody think him a ruffian. Raeburn's features would never have been awarded compliments for innocence; and Denasso's yellowish drowsiness suggested that he had been dipped into crime so often as to be at ease though murder attended robbery.

"Rascals!" said the magistrate, who, whatever his weaknesses, was bold enough to tell them to their ugly faces what he thought.

"But without rascals," said Heddon, "there would be no need of magistrates. Your office is beholden to us. So more respect!"

"Respect! I'll—I'll—Respect! What fools are—what d'you want?"

"And rascals, your Honor, know much better than other people what is becoming in their magistrate. And how do you think beachcombers feel to see you, you who preach and punish, seize a slave girl and put her under your roof, like a Turk!"

The magistrate opened his mouth to roar, but Heddon laughed at him. For a moment the magistrate's mouth remained slightly open, astounded, not sure whether Heddon was a simple fool or crazy.

With a struggling effort the magistrate blustered: What insult was this? He knew what he was about! He protected from a rascally Frenchman and devilish Chinamen a half-white Christian-bred child! His wife, sir, attended the child.

"Old Turk!" said Heddon.

Wind came out of the night sky, shaking trees till branches groaned and thrashed. The screen mats, half rolled up, rattled with bellying jars like sails caught aback, and the crumpled newspaper went as if in flight from beside the chair. The lamp's light trembled under the gusty draft. Thunder, beginning far off in a faint growl, with reverberant roll rumbled nearer until it seemed to split the sky overhead with a final crash that jarred loose rain. The lightning, again and again, with wavering thrusts struck toward the earth.

"The girl," said the magistrate, lifting his voice against the storm, "was stolen from a mission. I shall send her back when—"

"Never nearer a mission than the street outside of it!"

"She was raised in a Hongkong mission!"

"No more than you. She's a nautch girl—or whatever means nautch in Chinese. Born and bred!"

"Half white, sir!" roared the magistrate, not used to being contradicted. "She speaks English!"

"No more white than inked milk. And if she speaks English, it's the better to lie to more men, as when she told you of the mission. I've come for her!"

"You've come— What's that you say? But lay a hand on her— I'll have you in prison for life. For life, sir!"

"I'll risk the sentence," said Heddon; then in the way that made so many persons think his brain a little twisted, added, "After all, you know, the world itself is but a shabby jail—we're crowded in, all doing life."

The magistrate glared for a moment, then deepening his voice and popping his eyes in a way that at times scared offenders half out of their wits, demanded:

"What, sir, do you purpose to do with her?"

"Return her to the man who bought her honestly, or being clever, stole her. Which, I don't know. Either way, he's more the right to her than you!"

"Vioux?"

"Vioux."

"Scoundrel, sir! You've joined with that scoundrel to—"

"Scoundrel and no doubt of it! So am I, but for this night honest enough to do as I've been hired. Now, where's her room, or do we search the house? I've brought men enough to crack your niggers' heads, and they are here for no other purpose!"

"You would give the child back to that scoundrel!" cried the magistrate, endeavoring to be shocked when he was merely baffled.

"Child? Being Chink, she's ten thousand years old—was born so!"

"She's a young girl, and you—you, a white man of the Christian race, you would give her—"

"You've done as much for a fee less than mine," said Heddon, reckless as a doomed man. "Married young girls to old scoundrels!"

"You're crazy! Crazed!" said the magistrate with conviction.

"All right, think of me as you please; I still think worse than you of myself for this. But being started, I'm going on. Vioux's a scoundrel, but he'll be good to her, for she's precious merchandise—if hurt or damaged, the value's gone out of her. But her fate tends toward good luck, for any man that pays the price will prize her. Anyhow, she's not of Europe, but Asia; was born of a harlot and trained to be sold like a toy; expects it, wants it; will die of pining if denied—as pearls lose luster if not worn!"

"You — you — you —" the magistrate puffed hoarsely, trying to bellow.

"Aye, true, I may not believe all that, but even rascals such as we are—" he swung his hand indifferently; the gesture made the shellbacks stiffen as if pricked, and shufflingly stir in their tracks, as if reminded that they, too, were in the scene, not spectators —"but even rascals such as we are lie to themselves, like magistrates, convincingly —if paid enough! Walscher's paid you in a thousand ways to be his friend, no matter what the facts. And I've been paid to take that girl, tonight."

Magistrate Davies sat speechless. He, being sensitive to insult, felt the jeers without at all seeing that Heddon jeered also at himself.

The wind blew in stormy gusts; it threw rain-splatter half across the wide veranda, wetting the feet and legs of the men standing there, but they hardly noticed. The rattle of palm leaves had the sound of hail. Lightning broadly flickered, like the winking eye of an archangel into which one could not stare; and the lightning showed a figure that stood in the darkness of the doorway.

Raeburn, startled, pointed; but Denasso, who was never startled, spoke:

"Behind you, Captain! There—in the doorway!"

Heddon, with fist drawn back, faced about toward the form lurking dimly within the dark doorway; a woman's figure. He then raised the lamp and took a step nearer.

The magistrate, staring across his shoulder, started to rise; but Old Tom, in front of him, said savagely:

"Don't ye move! Set back an' stay fast! Hear me, you!"

Heddon looked down into the woman's wrinkled face. Hunger leaves such lines, food does not take them out. She was haggard, being starved from the lack of warm kindness by her stout Buddha-bodied husband. With one hand she held tightly about her a dark loose dressing-gown that was like a cloak making her nearly invisible except for her white face and the white hem of the nightdress above her bare feet.

"You, madam, have nothing to fear!" said Heddon quickly, and made a reassuring gesture toward his cap.

Mrs. Davies nodded in quick little jerks. She was not afraid, though nervous. Bending slightly she peered under the light toward her husband; then with a furtive beckoning she stepped back, moving as if for concealment into the darkness of the room. Heddon followed, carrying the lamp.

Within the room, and speaking a little shrilly, as if wanting what she said to be heard out on the veranda, she begged:

"Oh, please, please, don't hurt my husband!"

"No thought of it, madam!"

She backed still farther, beckoning, then whispered:

"Take her away—oh, do! I thought he was asleep—the storm woke me. I came to wake him. I heard what you said about her. Do take her away! Maybe it's not right of me, but I don't like her, don't want her here. She is so—so— I'll show you her room. Don't let him know. You won't, please?"

"He'll know nothing but what you tell. Say we made you show us." Heddon turned, called, "Denasso, and you, Jack, come alone!"

They came inside the house. Mrs. Davies doubtfully peered at them through the lamplight. Her graying hair had been touseled on the pillow; she had weak old eyes, brightened now by a kind of pathetic daring. Her glance, doubtful on Raeburn's face and Denasso's, turned reassuringly toward Heddon. It was odd that she was not frightened by him, for his shoulders were higher than her head and the mere look of him had made hard men stand aside. But she had heard him speak, and seemed admiringly to trust him. No doubt when Heddon would be gone she must tell the magistrate what a villain the fellow looked, but would always remember him with respect. She had never opened her mouth to her husband, except humbly, though like every other husband, perhaps more than most, he had faults of which she would have been glad to speak.

She had stepped from her slippers to come nearer the door without their *flip-flop* being heard; and now in her eagerness she forgot to step into them, but pattered before Heddon, showing the way.

He, holding the lamp, followed through the room without glancing aside. They entered a hallway, turned, and with much twisting through the wide sprawling house, came to a closed door.

"Here, in there!" said Mrs. Davies, whispering as if still fearful that her husband might overhear.

"You, knock and get her out," Heddon told Denasso, who had been brought along to reassure the girl.

He knocked lightly, calling:

"Po-Shu? Your friends have come, Po-Shu? It is I, Denasso!"

He paused, head cocked a little, listening.

"You don't make enough noise," Heddon told him, then struck the door with rattling fist blows.

"She's there," said Mrs. Davies, timidly anxious, "and can't be still asleep!"

"Frightened," Denasso suggested. "She is only a child."

"Oh, you want to try a serenade, do you? We haven't time." Heddon tried the door. "Locked. Call again. Tell her to come out, or—"

"Po-Shu? Po-Shu? It is I, Denasso!" No answer. "Little Plum Blossom, open the—"

"Plum the—" said Heddon. "You get back. We're not troubadours—we're slavers! Here—" to Mrs. Davies—"hold this lamp."

She took it in both her hands, shuffling backwards, slightly aside.

"Back," said Heddon, pushing Denasso aside. "Plum Blossom!" Heddon repeated derisively, then his shoulder hit the door, and with creak and crack it splintered in the lock. Another lurch and it broke free.

The door, on warped hinges, scraped resistingly against the floor mat. Heddon, impatient, shoved it wide and peered into the darkness, not trying to see so much as waiting for Po-Shu's voice.

"She's frightened, I tell you," said Denasso reproachfully; then he called gently, "Po-Shu? Little Po-Shu?"

"Let me have the light," said Heddon, and turning, took it from Mrs. Davies; then with lamp upraised he stepped into the room.

A gust of wind through an open window set shadows dancing as the flame flickered.

"Po-Shu?" Po-Shu?" Denasso called coaxingly.

Against the wall was a bed. Heddon, holding the lamp high in one hand, turned to this and bent over it. The covers lay as they had been tossed hastily aside.

"She's hid!" said Denasso, peering about at the darkness.

Heddon touched the bed, ran his hand down under the covers:

"She's gone! Been gone—the bed is cold!"

"But where could she—" Mrs. Davies began, having doubts, suspecting Po-Shu of cunning.

Heddon, sheltering the lamp's chimney top with his palm, went to the open window. The window had been screened against insects with netting. The netting, torn away, remained now as nothing but rags and filaments that fluttered in the wind.

"Oh, ho, so that's it! Yellow-bellies? Aye, I'll bet they've got her!"

Heddon peered into the raining darkness. Palms rattled their leaves; loose ends of vines scratched and tapped against the house. The rain came down as if being poured. Lightning played through the clouds.

Heddon turned with a laughing shout:

"Ho, Jack, you prophet's son! Not lucky men! And you"— he caught Denasso, gripped him—"Plum Blossom, eh? Hoodoo's the word! Old Davy can turn Chinktown upside down and maybe shake her out. But we, we go to sea tonight just the same as if we'd found her—or dance in leg irons to old Davy's piping!"

II

PERHAPS Mrs. Davies, then or afterwards, did not cherish their blessings upon her nearly gray head, but anyhow she had them. With hardly more than three words from Heddon, she understood his need of an hour or two before Lianfo was aroused.

"No one must know and you must not be caught!" she said, excited and eager. It was perhaps the nearest thing to adventure in her life. "Here, use this!" She pulled a sheet from Po-Shu's bed, then shook it out in the lamplight to see how badly it was worn; but new or old, she thrust it at Heddon. Then outspoke the wife, loyal in even her deceit, "You won't leave him there on the veranda? In the wet? He takes cold so easily!"

"We'll leave him warm as toast," said Heddon, who had given over the lamp to Raeburn and was tearing the sheet.

With her cloak tucked carefully about her, Mrs. Davies lay in Po-Shu's bed and was covered. Strips of sheeting were passed clear around the bed, tying her in. Her thin wrinkled old hands were tied carefully, so as not to hurt. She spoke through the loose pretense of a gag:

"You must get away! I never liked Mr. Walscher—"

"If you hear anybody coming, groan!" Heddon told her. "Be struggling loose!"

She bobbed her head jerkily, understanding, excited. To the end of her days she would have an exciting memory secreted from her husband. It would no doubt be like a kind of revenge.

"We'll leave him high and dry," Heddon assured her.

And they left him high and dry on a couch in the room, tightly bound, firmly gagged. He might flounder and knock about a little, but there was small chance of the servants' being awakened. The storm would make them lie snug and think all sounds the beating of wind and rain.

TO BE CONTINUED

APULIA

by Lewis J. Rendel

THAT August afternoon, as I tramped toward the heel of the Italian "boot," was one of the few times that I have hated the south.

The heat had taken on a malignant quality. The air seemed to die and the puffs of hot land breeze brought only dust. For hours there had been no human figure. The foreshore was all reddish clay, fissured by the sun, with occasional outcroppings of monstrous prickly pear. The waves lapped the yellow beach without breaking, as if the Mediterranean were too languid to foam. Inland were miles of wheat stubble, with lone farmhouses, pink-walled behind the agave hedges.

At only one place was there any life, where a dry ravine broke the monontonous low cliffs. Some stone hovels, dripping colored rags and red passion flowers; a few vines, sparse olives; half a dozen lads wallowing like pale porpoises in a sea so purple that one wondered at their unstained limbs. We joined them, hoping that the water would be cooler than the land, but it was merely wetter. The boys were from the mountains that stood up like blue glass on the northern rim. Their cheeks showed that, round and red; they seemed a different breed from the greenish-olive lowlanders.

They had come down from the pines to work on the now finished wheat harvest. Tomorrow they would go back, happy in having escaped the coast fevers. Their skins were of that thick, warm white which no sun seems able to change. Their bare bodies had the austerity of old marble; by contrast our tanned backs looked like colored plaster. They were classic, while we were *barocco*. Their brains were classic, too, being of a glorious emptiness. Snatches of trolled song, much horseplay, and not a word save of those vital topics, girls and wine. So might the young colonists of Magna Græcia have splashed and talked, heedless of Plotinus and his metaphysicians splitting hairs down at Krotona.

They were the very spirit of male youth, those lads; yet one could somehow see their coming age looking over their bare shoulders. A few years and they would be as the elders in these upper villages. Grave men in dark, earth-stained clothes, weather beaten and browned, talking slow news of vines and wheat. Classic still; and even, one suspects, still pagan, for all the church bells ringing their cracked Angelus to the swift southern dusk.

The cliffs swung back to give room for a tiny port. Saffron houses with rotting balconies, mirrored in a stagnant lagoon. Drying fishnets, their clean smell of tar mixing with the exhalations from stinking mud. Dark-clad women muffled against the heat; a mangy cur licking sores in a church doorway; fishermen, in bathing trunks and red jerseys, striding like suntanned hawks. A single inn was incongruously labeled "Albergo di Can Grande." Inside it a toothless hag mumbled garlic speech. And under every skin, in every eye, one caught the greenish yellow of malaria.

Of course, it has been established by research that mosquitoes of a certain kind are the carriers of the malaria microbe. There were mosquitoes enough here, great filmy things with beaks like young bayonets. But one seemed to see that fever as an actual presence, wanly hectic, brooding its blue fingers through the shadows. A seated, unseen judgment on the land for its three thousand years of misspent history, its even more wilfully misspent present. Some draining and diking, fifty years of reforesting in these blue mountains would wipe that palpable shade out of existence. But this is Italy—

Places have their moods, even as do people, and the Ionian coast was inimical that day. One seemed almost to see the spirit of the land, incredibly old and incredibly tired. Phœnician and Greek, Christian and Moor—so much had happened there. Like an old, old woman, it sat in the rags of better days. The heat that made the dusty olives seem to dance was the subtle poison of her breath.

Déodat Dolomieu

Another of the
Goodly Company of Adventurers

by Post Sargent

FOR the general reader, if not for the deeply learned scientist, his memory and fame—like Saint Peter's—rest upon a rock. The mineral "dolomite" was named after him. The changes rung upon this word, the space allotted in encyclopedias to his name and discoveries alone would convince a sceptic that most of the learned *-ologies* owe a debt of gratitude to Déodat Dolomieu.

At heart, let us not doubt, he was a peaceful scientist, or thought he was, which comes to much the same thing, since the other chap is always held by one to be the aggressor. Which is a diplomatic approach to the statement that Dolomieu—famous geologist—once killed his man. A reminder that peace hath its adventures no less renowned than war.

Not that Déodat Dolomieu was a timid soul, despite a mind that browsed peacefully on neither flesh nor vegetable, but on rocks eocene, cretaceous, azoic— The fine enthusiasm that led him to choose volcanoes as playthings, and to flirt with the crater of Aetna when her mood was ugly, would seem to preclude in him the sense of fear.

Of a noble French family—his father was a marquis, count and lord of this and that—he was born in 1750. Almost at birth he was admitted to that mysterious company, the Order of Malta. Of which more hereafter. His youth was passed in the development of his love of the natural sciences, and in fulfilling his obligations to the Order of Malta as a novice knight upon one of its ships.

When eighteen years old and thus cruising in the Mediterranean, Dolomieu was gravely insulted by one of his noble shipmates. Since his "honor was at stake"—according to the dubious ethics of those days—he challenged his traducer.

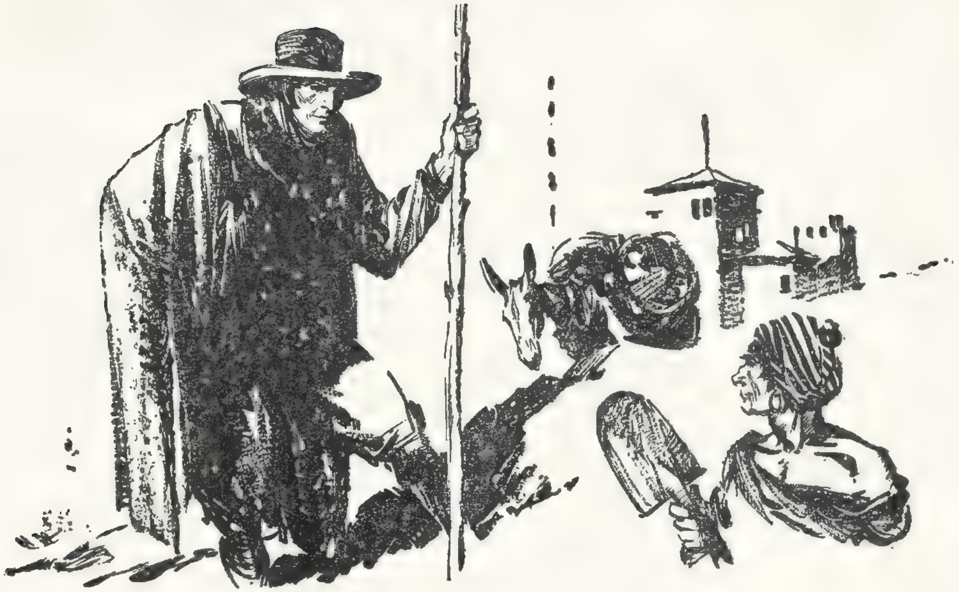
The ship reached the port of Gaeta. With swords concealed beneath their cloaks, the gray dawn a mere promise of the opal Italian sunrise to follow, the two young men slipped ashore. Dolomieu, still seething with the anger of callow youth; the other calm and disdainful of his adversary, with the confidence born of past successes with the sword.

Two went ashore. One returned. That one was Déodat Dolomieu.

The Order of Malta was powerful in those days. Ensconced in the little isle from which it took its name, the ancient Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem thrust the long fingers of their jurisdiction into all the crannies of Europe. Its rules were explicit. For its members its decrees were final. The laws of the Order forbade the code duello.

Brought to Malta and tried before the Grand Master, young Dolomieu was stripped of his rank in the Order and condemned to perpetual imprisonment. For nine

"Déodat Dolomieu," copyright, 1926, by Post Sargent.



months he languished in the dungeons of the Order. But such was the pressure brought to bear by the King of France and Pope Clement XIII, that Dolomieu was freed by the Grand Master and reinstated in his privileges in the Order.

Now his mind turned to the sciences that were to make him renowned. Henceforth he will be Dolomieu the geologist and mineralogist, student and discoverer of the secrets of the earth. The underworld of France and Italy became his workshop; the depths of Aetna his laboratory.

"Aetna is as yet unknown either by physicists or chemists or naturalists. Only vague conjectures are had as to what serves as fuel for its fires. Hammer in hand, I have tried all the currents of lava that it possesses." And then a description of all the marvelous stores of mineral wealth and beauty that few men have seen in the bowels of "Vulcan's workshop."

The type of adventure that is rarely sung. The questing scientist—the lonesome, silent trail over mountain crags—the smoking crater's edge—the gates of hell half-open below; above, the parched and breathless sky—faint quiverings, or titanic shudders of earth—the pools and thermal springs of corroding alum and vitriol—the glowing, molten, creeping slag—rainbow beauty and loathsome death!

For years a vagabond journey, with a purpose at every turning of the meandering trail. One striking purpose—never to be realized by him—is of interest to Americans. The year was 1790. France had but just overthrown the ancient régime.

"After deliberation I have resolved to send my mineral collection to the Congress of the United States of America; I shall make them this gift of the productions of the Old World on the condition that, in another hundred years, they will send to my country a collection of the products of America which they will have had time to study and collect. I shall thus make myself useful to those good people who have learned to know the value of liberty. I shall set this other condition that America will be obliged to this reciprocity only if my country shall have preserved its liberty."

A hundred years later, by a singular coincidence, although probably without knowledge of Dolomieu's expressed wish, a famous American* gave to the French Museum of Natural History a complete collection of the precious stones of America.

The French Revolution was an accomplished fact. The Reign of Terror passed with Robespierre. Napoleon, the First Consul, climbed into the saddle of power and started on his Egyptian campaign. Dolomieu, liberal nobleman and scientist, was dragged reluctant from his preoccupations and carried on the campaign. The goal was unknown. Unscrupulous Bonaparte lied to him.

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*J. P. Morgan.

"I asked him if in this country unnamed there were mountains and stones. 'Many,' he replied to me. 'In that case I will go with you,' I said laughing."

The island of Malta, fortified and self-sufficient, seemed to Napoleon a dangerous obstacle in his path. Arriving there, Dolomieu was ordered ashore as envoy, to command the Grand Master to surrender. High words passed between the scientists and the military despot. Why doubt the issue of such unequal combat of words? Dolomieu went; Malta perforce surrendered. Dolomieu incurred the undying hate of the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, who ranked the unwilling envoy as a willing traitor to his oath.

Sick, unable to pursue his geological explorations in Egypt, Dolomieu received permission to return to France. The voyage home was a series of mishaps. Algerian corsairs pursued their ship and were on the point of capturing it when a violent tempest arose. "Leaking at every joint," the vessel limped into Tarento after a voyage of thirteen days. But the danger lay before, not behind them.

Calabria was in revolt against the French. The passengers of the half-wrecked ship were considered prisoners and thrown into prison. Cordier, a fellow passenger of Dolomieu, has left a note of the adventure:

> Finally, the 20th of March, 1799, we entered the harbor of Tarento, where we hoped to find Frenchmen and friends and found only fanatics, real savages clothed in European garb. We were made prisoners, and—would have been massacred that very night—we were officially robbed of all we possessed."
>
> After two months of prison, the order was received to send the captives to Messina. All were subsequently freed except Dolomieu. Several Sicilian members of the Order of Malta had recognized the scientist among the captives. They denounced him to the authorities, who sent him to Messina, to be dealt with by the Grand Master. He was thrown into the prison of the city and there treated like a criminal.
>
> Dolomieu had succeeded in keeping several books with him. On the margins and fly-leaves of these books, still to be seen in the library of the Museum of Natural History of Paris, Dolomieu wrote the record of his adventures and sufferings. Doubtless expecting death, he wrote on one page—with ink made from the soot of his lamp, and with splinters of wood in lieu of pen—the following undelivered message:
>
> "I pray the person into whose hands this book may fall, I beg him by all the considerations that may move him, by all the motives that should touch his feelings or interest his honor, I implore him by all he holds most dear, to have it delivered in France to my sister.—DÉODAT DOLOMIEU, Member of the National Institute.

In a dungeon cell almost without light, lacking sufficient air and food, Dolomieu filled the margins of his books with a description of his daily life and with scientific notes. An epic achievement worthy of a place beside the similar work of Silvio Pellico "My Prisons," which is the classic prison tale of all literature.

"Now I am under the most absolute sway of a jailer. This man has over me the most unlimited authority; he can practise on my person all the vexations, all the barbarities that he can imagine, without fear of reprisal on my part, without my having any recourse to justice, without my even being able to interest humanity in my case, or to excite compassion! And yet I still live!

"Now, enclosed in a space twelve feet in length by ten in height and width, I have nothing to contemplate save my own wretchedness and the strangeness of my destiny—and yet I still live!"

For twenty-one months Dolomieu was held in his vile prison while the authorities of Messina deliberated over his fate. Death was at length close, for the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, whose headquarters had now been set up in Russia, demanded him of Messina. The Russian Czar, Paul the First, had succeeded to the place of Grand Master.

The Court of Naples hesitated. France was indeed hated—or rather Napoleon. To deliver Dolomieu to the power of the Czar and Grand Master was tantamount to pronouncing the sentence of death upon the famous scientist. Vicarious punishment to all Frenchmen, but—Napoleon was Napoleon! Who knew how soon his army might be swinging back to Italy and—Naples?

Meanwhile, Cordier, Dolomieu's fellow passenger on their return voyage from Egypt had managed to reach France. The news of Dolomieu's imprisonment in Messina was common property of learned bodies and governments. Word reached them soon of the contemplated surrender of the captive to the Grand Master.

Napoleon seemed to make no move. The French Institute, the Royal Society of England, the King of Spain, ambassadors and other dignitaries interceded for the prisoner. Lord Nelson wrote to add his influence; the English fleet cruised in the Mediterranean just then.

Messina hesitated. Then partly yielded. Dolomieu would not be delivered into the hands of Paul the First.

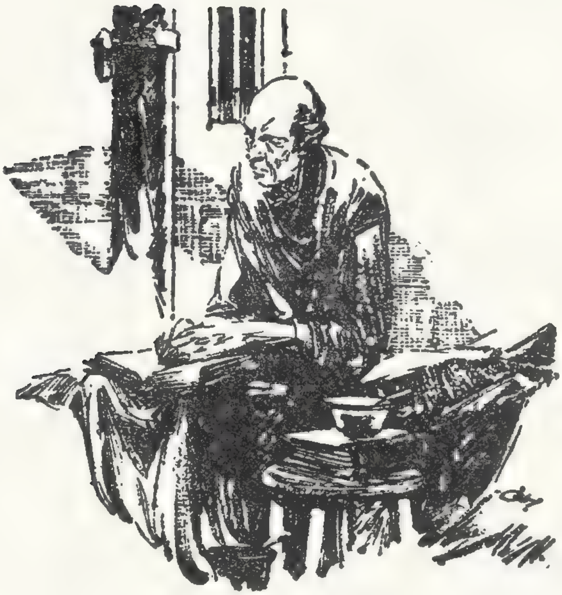
Napoleon still made no move. Then the cannon of Marengo spoke. Dolomieu was but an incident in the plans of the Little Corporal, no doubt; a speck in the oiling of those great cogs that moved the juggernaut of conquest. Troublesome, but not unconsidered. In the terms of the armistice imposed upon the King of the Two-Sicilies, Napoleon made known by Article VII, that one of the terms of the Peace of Florence was the liberty of Dolomieu.

Thus Messina lost her victim. For her promise had been a lie. Relying on the seeming apathy of Napoleon in the matter of the captive, Dolomieu's jailers had planned to hand him over to the mercy of the Russian Czar.

Déodat Dolomieu made a triumphal entrance into Paris. His dog's-eared book, the margin-smutted "Mineralogy of Volcanoes," accompanied him. From ten book-edges the recurring refrain, "*Et cependant, je vis encore!*"—"And yet, I still live on!"—grinned out at the cheering crowds.

I do not know whether Déodat grinned or not. He was a serious scientist, mind you!—sedate and fifty—and worn by privations and sufferings.

He ate and slept, then struck out for his old mountain haunts, where he browsed for a few more months on rocks eocene, cretaceous, azoic—and then he died, aged fifty-one.



Arthur O. Friel's

New Complete Novelette
of the Amazon Country
relating the further
Adventures of Sixto Scott

The Ogre

LET ME correct you on that point, señor.

Those man-eating fish known as *caribes* are not named after the old Caribe—or Carib—Indians. It's quite natural for you to think so, since you know the Caribs were fierce fighters and once owned all this Orinoco region. But the truth is just the reverse. That word *caribe* means "cannibal." And the Indians got the name because they were supposed to be man-eaters, and the fish because they certainly are.

Personally, I don't believe that the Indians hereabouts ever were anthropophagi, except possibly on rare occasions when they were forced into cannibalism by famine or made blood-mad by war. Yes, I know that the Spanish conquistadors gave them that reputation. But if you will look up that point in history you will find that the only authenticated cases of cannibalism in Venezuela were those where the cannibals were the conquistadors themselves. Yes, sir! White men—Spaniards and Germans—ate Indians! And what's more, they ate them when the Indians had offered them other food. They became *ogros;* ogres*.

So I should hardly put much faith in what those noble conquerors said about the Indians. I'd say they were either malicious liars or ignorant liars, but liars anyway. And most of their descendants are just as ignorant of the Indians today, and just as ready to believe the worst about them. Take my Guahibos, for example, my brown *Indios* of the Colombian plains, who trade me their hammocks and paddle my boats and always make me welcome at their settlements. In all the years I've known them, they never have lifted a hand against me. And yet, because they have killed a few Venezuelans who were badly in need of killing, men along this Orinoco are always predicting that they'll do the same to me—yes, and maybe eat me afterward. Not content with calling them savages and assassins, they have to insinuate that they're *caribes* as well. Bah! There's about as much chance of my being eaten by them as by the Ogre of Atures.

Pardon? You haven't heard of that ogre? Well, *hombre,* then you've missed something. I thought you'd have heard of that affair when you were making the overland portage at Atures to get around the rapids. It was one of the queerest things that ever happened hereabouts—and that's saying a good deal, for there has been more than one weird happening in this up-river country. If all the men who have mysteriously disappeared up here could come back, they would have some strange tales to tell. And if their ghosts could walk up to this camp-fire tonight and stand here

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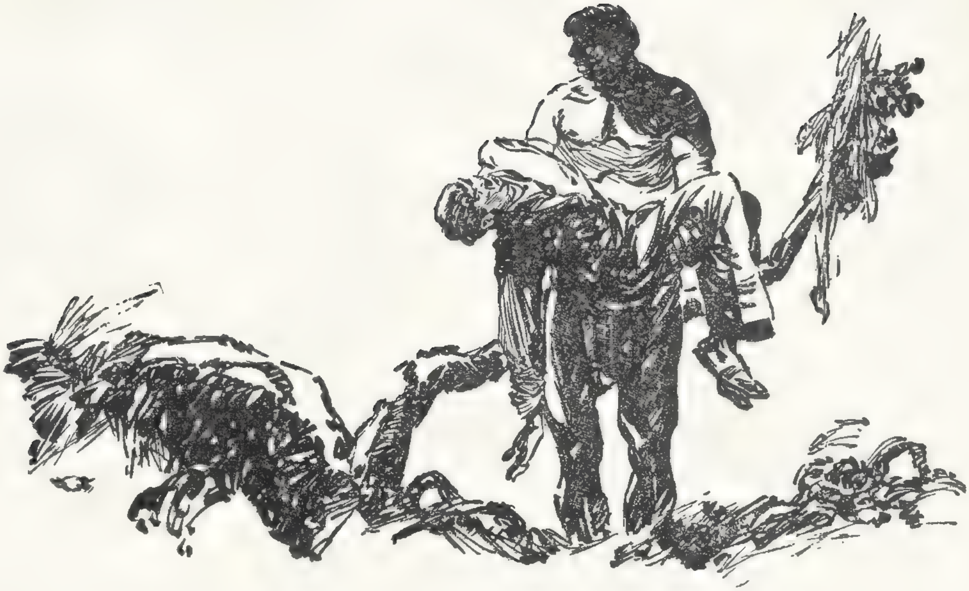
*True. See Camp-Fire.

"*The Ogre,*" *copyright, 1926, by Arthur O. Friel.*



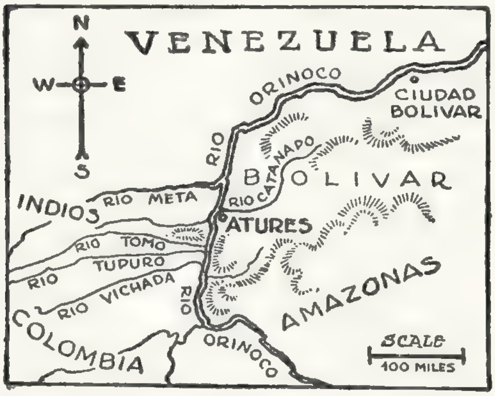
looking as their bodies looked when last seen, you'd need several drinks to make you sleep, I'll bet. Many of them would be headless—men decapitated with machetes by the outlaw army of Coronel Funes—and some battered out of shape by death in the rapids, and some torn apart by crocodiles; some crushed to pulp by serpents, some bloated by snake venom, some emaciated by starvation; and more than a few would be decorated with bullet-holes or knife-stabs, or with arrows and poisoned darts. But in all the lot none would startle you like the gleaming white skeletons of the men caught by the ogre.

It was back in the time of Funes, the last year of his eight-year reign here, when this thing came about. Funes had the whole Territorio de Amazonas in his grip, and maintained the usual garrison at Atures, where the Territory began or ended, according to whether you were traveling south or north. As you know, Atures is at the lower end of the great rapids, and, because everything moving up or down the river must pass overland there, it was an important strategic point for him, controlling everything above. So he kept a strong gang there, under an officer who enforced discipline almost as good as that of a decent army.

That officer naturally had to be a hard case himself in order to boss a garrison made up of robbers, murderers and worse. And the captain in charge there that last year was about as hard as they come. What his real name was I don't know—many of the Funes outfit had left their own names far behind them—but the one he used was Atroz. It fitted. It means, you know, either "atrocious" or "enormous," and he was both. His cruelty was notorious, and he was as big as I am; bigger, in truth, for he was bloated from drink and inaction, while I keep myself lean by long journeys. Not that he was unwieldy; he could handle himself if he needed to; but he seldom needed to. Every man in the Atures gang was afraid of him, and all he had to do was to look hard at one of those cutthroats and lick his lips in a way he had, and that tough bird would sweat blood. He was the man for the place, was Atroz.

When he first came there, I heard, one or two of the gang tried to do him in, and what he did to those chaps in return was something the rest never forgot. He didn't just kill them—that would have been too mercifully short to suit him. He left them alive, but whimpering wrecks that were only half human afterward. From that time on he had nothing to do but to carry on the routine and amuse himself with rum and women. His boss, the Coronel, seldom came to Atures, as he wasn't fond of making the fifty-league trip from San Fernando down through the worst mosquito-cursed section of the river; and whenever he did come he found things as he wanted them. As long as Atroz ran the place right Funes didn't care how he amused himself. So the big brute could be as brutal as he liked. And he was.

I got on well enough with him, though, when I made my trips through Atures. For that matter, I never had any real trouble with any Funes men anywhere. I was out of their jurisdiction, so to speak, being a Colombian, with my headquarters a long way west of the Orinoco; and besides, it was well known that I was just a hammock trader who minded my own business and let others do the same; so nobody troubled me much. As for Atroz himself, he seemed to take a liking for me, for no particular reason. Maybe it was because we were of about the same size physically. Anyway, on my first trip through Atures after his appointment I found him quite affable—that is, after he sized me up. His first greeting was a bit harsh. That, though, was his attitude toward everybody, a sort of official habit; and I heard of it before I saw him, so it didn't anger me as it otherwise might.



I first learned about him at Salvajito, which, as you know, is the upper port of the long portage. There's not even a house there now, but in those days there was a sort of outpost station at the place, with half a dozen men to take turns at guard duty, and a corporal in command. Another outpost, twice as strong, under a *sargento*, was stationed at Zamuro, the lower port, where the piraguas and canoes lay. Atures itself, you remember, is about midway between the two ports, near the little black Rio Catañapo, which flows in from the mountains at the east.

Well, when I landed myself and my cargo at Salvajito I found the corporal in charge there to be one Roco, who had always been quite friendly to me; and while I was waiting for the carts to come we exchanged a little gossip. This Roco, I noticed at once, was more snappy and soldierly than he had ever been before, and more wary in his talk. In fact, he was about as loquacious as a spider while his men were within earshot. Answering one of my questions, he told me the place now was under command of Capitán Atroz; but not another word would he say about Atroz, even when I joked about the name; and his men were even more dumb than he. After a while, though, we drifted off to one side, and then he opened up.

"El Capitán Atroz," says he, glancing around and speaking low, "is one to handle with care, Sixto. You will have to meet him; every one passing up or down must come before him. He is harsh in his ways, and he is master here; and if you say anything to give him offense you may wish you had not come here. Speak him fair."

"*Sí?*" says I, drawing at my *cigarrillo* "And what do you think he could do to a poor little invalid like me?"

"One never knows what he may do, but it is most likely to be unpleasant," he answered, with another look around. "His name is not without meaning, be sure of that. And he is as big as you, or bigger. And anything he commands to be done will be done *pronto*. I am giving you friendly warning."

"*Gracias*," I nodded. "I appreciate it. An atrocious *hombre*, this Atroz, eh? But tell me, now, does he rob peaceable travelers?"

"Oh, he takes what he likes, of course." Roco shrugged. "But since you have only hammocks he probably will not disturb you in that way." Then he grinned and added: "If you had a handsome woman with you it might be different."

"Ah, so that is his preference?" I asked.

"Truly. He is a glutton for young women. Any man who brings one to Atures now is a fool."

"You mean that he takes the women of his soldiers?"

"He takes the woman of any man," says Roco, "if he fancies her. If the man objects—"

He slid a finger across his throat.

"A jolly fellow, in truth," says I. "And what does he do with the women when he tires of them?"

"Well, he does not tire of them quickly," he told me. "He likes to keep them as slaves. When he is in the mood he tortures one of them to hear her scream. He is very ingenious in such matters."

"Umph!" I grunted, scowling a bit. "And how many has he now?"

"Eight," he said. "There were two others, but they drowned themselves, and so— But no, I am wrong. There are nine instead of eight. He caught a new one only yesterday, a young half-Indian who came down the Catañapo with an *Indio* man from the mountains. That was a queer thing, too, a half-white girl coming down from those high *selvas* where only Indians live. Some romantic white man must have gone up there fifteen or eighteen years ago, though nobody knows who he was."

"Queer things happen," I remarked. "Did the Indian object to parting with her?"

"Yes, he was quite offensive about the matter. He said he was the son of a chief and would bring his men to kill Atroz. The fool! Atroz killed him instead—slowly, *poco á poco*—making the girl watch as he worked. She knows now who her master is."

Just then a couple of the men approached, and Roco said hurriedly:

"*Por amor de Dios*, say nothing of what I have told you! I have talked too much, and if Atroz should hear that my tongue is loose—"

"Sixto Scott carries no tales," I rebuked him. "Now if there is any small thing I can buy for you at Ciudad Bolívar—"

"I could make use of some new *alpargatas*," he suggested, looking down at his worn-out sandals.

"You shall have them," I promised. And no more was said, except the usual things concerning the moving of my cargo.

It was late in the day when I walked into the pueblo of Atures, and there was no chance of having my stuff ferried across the Catañapo and carried on to Zamuro before morning. So, after sending my *peónes* to the rancho of Tolomeo Otero, who ran the transport service at that time, I went with the *sargento* of the guard to the house of Atroz to pass inspection. Two sentries were sitting at his doorway, one on either side, and both stood up with a snap as he approached. They let the *sargento* pass, but held me outside until he returned, standing stiff and wooden with rifles ready and eyes fixed on me. When I spoke to them they gave me no answer. One of them, though, let his eyes slide toward the door a second and then shook his head about a quarter of an inch. Whether he was trying to warn me to be careful, or just telling me he dared not talk on duty, I don't know. Anyway, it was clear that Atroz had them scared dumb.

When the *sargento* took me inside it seemed that his genial *capitán* meant to try to scare me too. Sitting at a table, with a big revolver lying close to his right hand, he scowled at me as if minded to murder me where I stood. And he was as ugly as his name and reputation. Very swarthy, he was, with the heavy jaw and thick lips of a negro, the high cheekbones and coarse straight hair of an Indian, but the strong nose and straight-set eyes of a Spaniard. The eyes—brown—had a shine like those of a cat torturing a mouse, though they were heavily bloodshot from habitual rum-drinking; and when he spoke he showed his teeth as if ready to bite.

"Who are you?" he snapped. "And what have you?"

He knew the answers already, of course, having been told my business by the *sargento*. It was just his usual way of cowing whoever came in. But I replied:

"Sixto Scott, of the Rio Vichada, with my usual cargo of hammocks. Nothing of any particular value."

With that I picked up a paper of *cigarrillos* from his table, drew one out, lighted it, and blew smoke, grinning at him. The *sargento* looked scared, and Atroz himself seemed astonished and angered by my nerve.

"But," says I, unconcerned, "the Guahibo hammocks are very strong, as you probably know, and if you need a good hammock I shall be glad to give you one of my best. We big men wear them out rather fast."

He sat there scowling as fiercely as before, but after a minute a little smile seemed to flicker in his eyes. He looked me all over, from sombrero to *alpargatas* and back. Then he snapped at the *sargento*—

"*Vaya!*"

And to me, when the officer had gone almost at a run, he said in a grumbling tone—

"Sit."

I sat, smoked, and looked at him, and he at me. Soon he took a cigaret himself. When it was going he growled:

"I will take the hammock, *hombre*. My old one is a rotten thing of *moriche*, always breaking cords. Have you any decent rum?"

"Not a drop, decent or indecent," says I. "Have you?"

At that he grinned a bit.

"You are a cool one," he grunted.

I said nothing. He looked me all over once more, and then went on:

"But one must be cool of head to live among those Guahibo *tigres*, eh? And hard of hand too, eh?"

"Perhaps." I shrugged. There was little sense in telling a man of his type that my way of getting on with Indians was by treating them decently, not by abusing them. "I perceive that you have heard of me, since you know I live in the Guahibo country."

"*Sí*," he admitted. "The name of Sixto Scott has come to me. Men say you are *loco*."

"Quite likely they are right," I grinned. "But being crazy is like being drunk; if one enjoys it, why be sensible or sober?"

That fetched a chuckle from him. Without replying, he clapped his big hands together. Almost at once a door behind him opened. There stood a young woman, who timidly said—

"*Capitán?*"

"*Ron!*" he commanded, without looking around.

She stepped back, taking a quick look at me as she did so. Only a few seconds passed before she reappeared, bringing a small jug and two thick cups. She set these on the table and stood there, wooden.

"Pour two," he growled.

She poured out the white rum, and very carefully passed a cup to him.

"Serve *el señor*," he grunted.

She fetched the other cup to me. Her eyes did not rise above my hand. When I had taken the cup she turned to him and again stood waiting.

"*Vaya!*"

She went, like a soldier. As she closed the door she flashed one more look at me. And I, though I kept my face as wooden as hers, swore a little inside as I remembered what Roco had said about his captain's slaves. This woman was one of them; young and quite good-looking, but so thoroughly a slave that she dared not make a move without command, dared not even glance at another man when her master's eyes were on her. Behind his back, her face showed a faint animation indicating that she had once been a girl of spirit; but her dumb apathy before him proved that that spirit now was crushed.

But that was no concern of mine, and, since I was supposed to know nothing about the affairs of Atroz, I held my tongue, except to say "*Salud*" as I lifted the cup. The rum was plain *caballo blanco*, and very rough, but I put it away without batting an eye. He handled his own drink even more easily. So far as I could see, he did not swallow at all, letting the harsh stuff run down his throat like water down a pipe. Then he patted his belly and licked his heavy mustache.

"*Cra!* That sizzles when it hits the stomach, eh?" he grinned. "Liquor and love—what would life be without them, eh, *hombre?* Sometimes they are a trifle raw to the taste, but one must have them. How do you find the Guahibo women, you king of *Indios?*"

"Why, they are much like other women," I told him. "Most of them are uninteresting to a man of discrimination, but here and there can be found one worth having."

"Ah, *sí*, there is truth in that," he nodded. "Few of them are worth keeping, except as animals. But you are a lucky devil—you have hundreds to choose from, eh? It is not so here. I should like to exchange places with you for a while, Sixto."

The catty eyes leered at me, and he chuckled fatly.

"Well, I don't know that I want your job, *amigo*," I said. "This Atures is not to my liking as a place to stay. But the Rio Vichada lies open to you whenever you wish to visit it."

There was little chance of his making such a visit, of course—the Vichada was too far away—and less chance of his coming out of it alive if he meddled with Guahibo women. But it cost me nothing to give him that sort of answer, and it pleased him well enough. He scowled out through a window at the pueblo as if he hated it—probably he was sick of its monotony—but then he grinned a little as he imagined himself seizing women right and left in my country. Without recalling his slave, he filled the rum-cups again and threw his drink down his gullet as before. I drank a little of mine, and took another *cigarrillo*.

"I will come to see you some day," he promised. "Pick out some of your prettiest girls for me. Now tell me something about life over there. I have not heard much about the Guahibos from one who knows them."

So I told him the sort of things that seemed likely to interest him: stories of fights and killings and slave-raids, and such stuff. We both drank as we pleased, and between the stories and the drinks he grew more mellow all the time. After a while he swung the subject back to women, and I talked of the Guahibo girls. Finally, seeing that the sun was down, and feeling hungry, I stood up to go.

"Well, it is time to eat," I reminded him. "And, by the way, I think my cargo has not yet been inspected and passed—"

"To the —— with it," he said, amiably enough. "I will send it through without inspection. Have another drink."

"No more now," I refused. "I have had enough. The next drinks shall be on me, when I come back from Bolívar. I'll fetch you some liquor you will like—the real old Maracaibo."

"*Bueno!*" He licked his lips again. "You are a man after my own heart. Till our next meeting, then, *vaya con Dios!*"

"The same to you," says I, and I started out. As I reached the door, though, he stopped me with a word.

"Wait," he commanded, with a queer grin. He clapped his hands again. The door behind him opened, and a woman—not the same one—stood there to receive his orders. He growled something at her, and she drew back and was gone. From beyond came some low, quick words, followed by a soft shuffle of feet. Then, moving rather lifelessly, through the doorway came a file of women, all glancing at me, then looking at him. He growled again, and they lined up against the wall on each side of the opening and stood still.

Nine of them, there were; all barefoot, all wearing loose wrappers, all quite young and light of skin. None was really white, but none was as dark as Atroz. None of them was really handsome, either, but several would have been more than passably good-looking if their expressions had not been so dull. A cheerless, hopeless lot they were, with no sign of feeling—except one. That one, the last to enter, had a rebellious expression, and her dark eyes seemed to burn with anger and hate.

Atroz looked them all over, licking his lips, and grinning in a half drunken way. Then said he:

"As I was saying, *amigo*, you are a man after my own heart. And since you are so thoughtful in the matter of the Maracaibo—one good turn deserves another, as the saying is. Perhaps you would like a companion this evening, or possibly two of them. If so, I am sure any of these—ah—ladies will be pleasant company for you. All but this one."

He turned a thick thumb toward the girl with the resentful look.

"Her temper is not so good—yet," he went on, his grin becoming cruel. "But all the others are of agreeable dispositions. Take your choice from them."

The girls were not afraid to gaze at me after that. All but the sullen one watched me. That one seemed not to understand what he was saying, and, although she gave me a short glance, she showed no indication of interest. Remembering Roco's talk, I knew she must be the captain's latest capture—the girl from the mountains—and that she probably comprehended little of the Spanish tongue. After that one look at me she stood glowering at Atroz, and if wishes could kill he would have dropped dead from his chair. Plainly she was not yet broken to his will.

After observing her a minute I again surveyed the rest, finding little more life in their faces than before. One or two of them appeared willing enough to go with me, but the others had that same listless expression. For my part, I felt less interest in any of them than they showed for me. I'm not much interested in any woman at first sight, anyway, unless she's strikingly attractive, and none of these girls impressed me at all. Besides, the whole thing rather sickened me. So I just said:

"Thanks, *amigo*. All these little ladies are good companions, I've no doubt. But to be frank, I have a mean headache—maybe a touch of fever, though I hope it's only sun—and I think I'd better sleep it off. Wait until I bring back the Maracaibo, and then perhaps we can all have a large evening together."

I grinned at all the girls, and most of them smiled back at me, while Atroz chuckled at the thought of an orgy. The girl with the burning eyes looked at me again, too, and this time she kept looking. I don't believe she understood my words, but perhaps my voice interested her. Anyway, we looked straight at each other a few seconds, and somehow I forgot all about the rest of them. Something in those eyes seemed to catch me and hold me.

"*Bien.* That is a good thought," came the voice of Atroz. "Bring enough of the Maracaibo, and we shall have a night you will remember long after you go back to your *Indios*."

"Right," said I, taking my attention off the girl. "*Buen' noche'.*"

And I left the house. As I passed out of the room, though, I glanced back. The mountain girl still was watching me. And when I walked away through the pueblo to the rancho of Otero I still could see her eyes.

Not being a reader of minds, I don't claim to be able to tell a woman's thoughts by the way she looks at me, unless she makes them unmistakable; and what was inside that girl's head when she fixed her attention on me I don't know. For a while afterward, though, I felt like trying to help her escape from the prison she was in. But there was no chance of getting her out of Atroz's grip before he tired of her, and after that it wouldn't do much good, probably. And I felt that if any way to freedom did open she would make use of it without help from me. Maybe she would open her own way. If she could get hold of a knife she would be likely to open Atroz's throat too. I wished her luck.

At the rancho I made my night arrangements, talked a while with Otero, and slept. Otero usually was a talkative sort of chap, but he had little to say now, and nothing at all about Atroz. Like everybody else, he was afraid of the big boss. So I left him early and turned in.

In the morning I chose a good hammock and sent it to Atroz, who returned a curt "*Gracias.*" And when my stuff was under way I proceeded to Zamuro, and so down the river to Bolívar. There I did my usual business and took my usual holiday. When I sailed into the Zamuro port again I had been gone about two months.

DURING my absence there had been changes in the Zamuro outpost, and, as luck would have it, the *sargento* in charge there on my return was the fellow who had taken me to the headquarters of Atroz. He knew, of course, that I had gotten on well with his fierce *capitán;* so he met me in an affable way. In fact, he still was amused by the memory of my gall in helping myself to the cigarets of the scowling tyrant, and about the first thing he said was:

"Ah, Sixto, you have returned to smoke more *cigarrillos* of the *capitán?* Or have you brought your own this time?"

"I have a few for my good friend the *sargento,*" I said, giving him a package of Emperadores. "And for your jolly chief I have brought something that may make him even more jovial."

"A case of rum," he guessed. "*Cra,* he needs it!"

"Ah, so?" I asked. "His fortune has not been good of late?"

I meant, of course, fortune in capturing women. The *sargento* understood, but he did not grin, even though nobody was near enough to catch our talk. Instead, he glanced behind him in a nervous way.

"Things are very bad," he said then.

"In what way?"

He sucked hard on his *cigarrillo*, scowling in a troubled fashion. At length he said:

"*El Capitán* will tell you, perhaps. I shall say this much: Sleep within walls while you are here."

I squinted at him, wondering. I never had slept within walls at Atures, preferring to sling my hammock in an open hut at Otero's place, with my Guahibos behind me; and, excepting a vampire which once had bled me, nothing had ever troubled me. Plainly some new danger now was abroad.

"*Gracias,*" said I. "I shall remember. By the way, I have a half-bottle of the Maracaibo which needs to be finished. Will you assist me?"

His sober face brightened, and he boarded the piragua with me in a hurry. It had been a long time since he had tasted anything better than *caballo blanco,* and the smooth old "little grandfather" was both honey and oil to his tongue. Only my own boys were aboard, and we two sat in the little cabin, out of the sight and hearing of all on shore. After a while, when he was grinning happily, I asked:

"Just what is wrong, here, *amigo*, that I should sleep in a hot house instead of in a cool hut? Are the bats or *tigres* bad at night, or is there something worse? Be sure I shall say nothing of what you tell me."

His grin disappeared, and he looked quickly behind him again—as a man does on a dark night, when he feels that some fearful thing is at his back. It seemed to be a habit, recently acquired.

"It is worse than bat and cat together, Sixto," he solemnly declared, when his eyes came back to mine. "It is— *Por Dios*, it is an *ogro!*"

For a minute I said nothing at all, but stared at him, wondering whether he had become a bit crazed. More than one Funes man had lost his reason.

"An *ogro!*" I exclaimed then. "A cannibal? An eater of men? *Válgame*, what do you mean?"

"I mean precisely that," he retorted, not relishing my tone. "A fiend of some sort that carries off men and eats them! A thing that walks by night and devours men to the bare bones! *Cra!* Those bones!"

He shuddered and gulped another drink—the last in the bottle.

"You have seen the bones?" I quizzed.

"*Sí*, that I have—and I wish I had not! Dead men are nothing, Sixto—I have seen many, and made a few myself—but those gleaming white bones of my own men—Ugh!"

He jumped up, face oozing cold sweat, and turned around on his heels as if to dislodge something at his back.

"*Caramba!* This is a weird tale, *amigo!*" I said. "It must be a *tigre* that does this—"

"When has a *tigre* had the feet of a man?" he disputed. "The feet of a giant man, with huge claws? And when has a *tigre* brought back the bones of its prey when it came for a new kill? And when has a *tigre* gnawed those bones so clean that not a shred of flesh remained—yes, and split the skull to devour the brains! *Ajo!* A *tigre*, like ——! A *demonio!* An *ogro!* A giant with the cunning of a serpent and the blood-thirst of a *caribe!*

"Listen! This fiend, I tell you, has come ten times in this month and taken a man each time! And not a man old or crippled, or a boy, from Atures town, but a sentry, a hard, alert man with rifle and machete, a man with meat enough to satisfy the appetite; and the last time—only two nights ago, at Salvajito—it carried off two *soldados* at once! And each time after the first it has left the bones of the man taken before, left them in plain sight. Twice it has come here, to this very spot, Zamuro, making its kill and leaving bones to mock us, and never a sound did it make, nor the victims either. Three times it has struck at Salvajito, and five times at Atures. From the very door of *el capitán* it has taken guards—from his very door, I say! Yes, and once it made a great daub of blood on that door, as much as to say it would soon take the chief himself! *Cra*, I wish it would snatch him tonight and—"

He stopped short, biting back the rest of it, and looking worried because he had said so much. And I sat staring at him without a word.

"Forget that I said that, I beg of you, Sixto," he gulped. "I—I am not myself—"

"Have no fear," said I. "You are as safe with me as with a *padre* of the church—perhaps more so. And I can understand how you fellows feel toward Atroz, even if you don't say it. He is not very pleasant these days, eh?"

"He is *el diablo* himself!" he growled. "One would think, from the way he treats us, that it was our fault that this fiend walks among us. He is a fat fool! *Ajo!* What am I saying? But it is a truth that he does himself no good by such abuse. Men are deserting, and if matters continue so for another week or two—"

He stopped again.

"There may be no garrison here, eh?" I finished for him. "Has he sent for more men?"

"No. Not yet. He does not want *el coronel* to know the condition here."

"Ah, so. He hopes to catch this *ogro*, no doubt."

"*Sí*. But he does not come out at night to do the catching himself, we notice. He has put more men on duty at night and fewer by day—giving the *ogro* more men to choose from—and stays safely in his house."

"Protecting his women, no doubt," I grinned.

"Ah, *sí*, precisely. He killed one of them a few nights ago."

"No! Truly? Which one?"

"One of the older ones. The name I do not know. He beat her head on a wall."

"Humph!" says I. "By the way, what of the young *Indio* girl from the mountains—

the one who had just come when I was last here?"

"That one is dead, too. She threw herself into the *raudal*, as some others have done, and so was drowned. It was only a few days after you had gone."

That made me swear a bit. Somehow that girl's eyes had haunted me at times while I was down the river, and more than once I had told myself I would try to get her clear of Atroz when I came back; buy her with a case or two of rum, perhaps, and turn her loose. I didn't want her for myself, and just why I felt like helping her, and not the others, I can't say; I just did. But she had found her own way out of it—and not the way I had rather expected. Atroz still was alive and atrocious.

The *sargento* grinned again as he listened to my remarks. They made him feel more at ease about the things he himself had said of Atroz. When I had finished he chuckled:

"I am grieved to hear you speak such impolite sentiments about my commander, Sixto, and perhaps I should report them. But instead I shall forget them. Now I go ashore. Remember to sleep within walls tonight."

"Wait," I objected. "Tell me more of that *ogro*. You say its feet have claws? Have its tracks been traced? Where does it go?"

"Only the devil knows," he said. "The tracks are found near the bones, and near the places where men disappeared, but they can never be followed far. They vanish as if the fiend had taken wing. The claws are as I have told you, but they are not those of a *tigre*—the feet are those of a giant—"

Just then some *soldado* ashore bawled loudly for him, and he jerked as if kicked. Then, growling, he climbed out. From the deck he gave that *soldado* the fanciest cursing I had heard in some time, damning him through seventeen different hells, and his father and mother with him. It was plain that his nerves were worn ragged.

I sat there a while alone, puzzling about this frightful creature that had come to prowl about Atures by night. The tale of the *sargento* was undoubtedly true—that is, he had told the truth as he knew it; and he himself had seen the bones he told of—bones picked so clean that even the brains were gone. Decidedly, such work could not be that of beasts or birds. A big *tigre* or two might possibly have killed those men, but it was very improbable—especially when there were corralled cattle to attack instead. Bones could be stripped by vultures, but not so thoroughly as these had been. And the splitting of the skulls, the huge demoniac footmarks, the menacing splash of blood on the door of Atroz—those things could have been done only by something in human form. The most logical explanation I could imagine was that some insane giant of a man was lurking somewhere around the region and raiding the post in the night hours. And if that was true, and if this giant was a cannibal, as everything indicated—why, then it was just as the *sargento* said; he was an ogre.

So I simply thought around in a circle and came back to where I had started. Then I got up, kicking myself for wasting time on useless puzzlings, and set my crew to putting ashore my cargo of Guahibo trade goods. My job was to move my stuff overland, not to tie my head in a knot over matters that didn't concern Sixto Scott.

AS USUAL, it was late in the day when I reached Atures. While I was on the road with the carts I noticed that the drovers were nervous—yes, even the bullocks were jumpy, though probably it was just the continual goading of the men that made them so. At the Catañapo ferry the crossing was made at double time. It was twilight then, and the workmen kept looking over their shoulders. They made the rest of the distance to the pueblo almost at a run, instead of at their usual sluggish gait. But in all the trip never a word was said about their reasons for haste, and I kept my own mouth shut.

When old Otero came out to greet me he said nothing of the ogre, either. What he did say was:

"I have made ready a room where you can sleep tonight, Sixto—indoors. There is a plague of bats just now."

"O, very well," said I. "Is there room also for my men?"

"Your *Indios?* But no, I do not shelter *Indios*. Let them sleep in the shed, or wherever they may. If anything happens to them, you have plenty of others."

But I thought otherwise about that. Those boys of mine were entitled to my protection, both because I was their *capitán* and because they had no other defense.

When we travel the Orinoco, you know, I make my men go unarmed, because I've found that they are less likely to get into trouble with the river people if they carry no weapons. Most folks along here are habitually hostile to armed Indians. So now it was up to me to stand by my crew.

"I think I prefer the outdoor air, Tolomeo. Bats are nothing new to me. I shall sleep in the usual place."

And I cut off protests by going to that hut and having my *chinchorro* slung there. Otero came and stood looking much troubled, but held his tongue. Two of the Funes men were standing near, observing everything, and the old fellow was afraid to speak the truth. When they saw that I meant to sleep out they looked at each other as if well pleased; and I understood their thoughts as well as if they had told them to me.

"We are safe for tonight," they were saying to themselves. "With this huge Scott and his *Indios* lying there like babes, the *ogro* can find a hearty meal without attacking us."

When I met Atroz I could see that a very similar thought was in his mind.

Taking a couple of quarts of the Maracaibo—not a whole case, not even half—I strolled over through the darkness to his house, singing a ditty as I walked, so that no apprehensive night-guard would shoot me first and identify me afterward. There should have been a moon, but, as often happens up there, a heavy cloud-bank had rolled over from the mountains and blackened the sky. A lantern burned on the Atroz porch, and as I came near I was halted sharply by two sentinels stationed in the shadows on each side. Even when they had made sure of me they acted suspicious. It was the captain himself who gave me entrance. He appeared suddenly in the doorway, cursed both men, and invited me in. As he stepped back, though, I caught the gleam of a revolver in one fist. He was as nervous as they.

"Did you bring the rum?" he demanded, gruffly, as I stepped on the porch.

"Most certainly," I returned, drawing the bottles from under my arm. "The real Maracaibo, as I promised you. I hope your thirst is in good condition, *Capitán*."

A curt grunt, without a smile, was his only answer. Even after we had opened a quart in his office and taken a good sample of the liquor he gave no sign of good cheer. True, his eyes shone as the smooth rum rolled down his throat, and he smacked his lips afterward; but a scowl stayed on his forehead, and his attempts at talk were short and jerky.

Sprawling in a chair, I smoked and talked about various things seen and heard along the river, taking a drink now and then, but making them scant—for I had no intention of dulling my senses that night with too much liquor. He listened, but in an absent way, as if half his mind were on something else. If he noticed that I was drinking very little he said nothing; that left all the more for him, and he did not neglect it. The good old Maracaibo seemed to have no particular effect on him, though. He did not relax enough to get the full benefit of it.

After a while I felt I had done enough entertaining, and asked a question or two, in an idle way.

"How goes everything here?" I inquired. "Has anything of interest come about since I passed down the river?"

"Bah! No!" he snapped, squinting at me cornerwise. "All is as dead as a cemetery."

"Ah," says I. "A monotonous spot, this, I have always thought. By the way, I hope all the little ladies are well."

"Oh, yes."

He took another drink. If he remembered the promise to make a big night of it on my return he gave no sign of it. I smoked another minute or two, and then yawned.

"I grow sleepy," I said. "I lost siesta today, with the landing of my supplies. So I think I'll go to my hammock."

"*Bien*," he answered. "You stay at the Otero rancho, as usual?"

"As usual. Out in the open hut, where it is cool."

Something like a wicked smile showed for a second in his eyes. Then he glanced through the iron-barred window at the moonless dark.

"That is sensible," he approved. "Well, then, a good rest to you."

"*Buen' noche'*," I replied. And I left him.

As I walked back to the Otero place, singing as before, I observed that nowhere about the town was an open door, and that the only windows where lights showed were those protected by bars. Nobody was moving about in the darkness, either, unless it was some invisible *soldado* with finger on trigger and ears open to the rear; and I much doubted if even those hard *hombres* were walking post—they were probably standing against good solid walls. With the moon buried, it was a fine night for the ogre to prowl.

"For your good wishes, you beast of an Atroz, I thank you," says I to myself. "And I trust that in spite of your walls and sentries the devil will fly off with you before daybreak."

Then, to make sure that it was not Sixto Scott who vanished—for I am not altogether foolhardy, nor so simple as I may seem at times—I set sentries of my own, and better ones than Atroz had. On entering my hut I spoke quietly to my Guahibos, waking those who had gone to sleep; and when all were alert I told them:

"*Muchachos*, I have learned that a big bad *tigre* has come to this place and walks here by night; a silent *tigre* that never coughs, but prowls without a sound, and kills men. So we must keep watch until daylight comes. You shall take turns at this. Ciro shall watch first, squatting on the ground at this corner. When he is tired he shall wake another of you to take his turn, and so on through the night. If the man on watch hears or sees or smells anything not right, he must wake every one else at once, quietly but very quickly. If he does not, this devil-beast may snatch him away. *Comprende?*"

They comprehended very well—that is, as well as I wanted them to. If I had told them the thing was an *ogro* they would have believed it to be a *demonio*, and would have been scared witless and useless; for a demon is a terrible thing to your Indian, a fiend not to be escaped or resisted, while even the worst *tigre* or serpent or other living thing can be killed and so does not paralyze him with horror. So, after a bit of muttering among themselves, they took their task calmly enough. Ciro squatted with my machete in his hand and every sense alert—senses keener than those of any white man, for that sort of thing—and the rest of us went to sleep. I myself felt far more at ease, with those savages of mine on the job, than if I had been guarded by the whole Funes force.

What time it was when I awoke I don't know, but it was a good bit later in the night. A fellow named Pepe was on watch, and I opened my eyes to find him shaking my arm. I sprang up at once, grabbing my rifle. In a couple of seconds he had roused the others by quick shoves, and we all were on our feet. Around us it was very dark.

"What is it?" I asked, speaking low.

"Something out there," grunted Pepe. "I do not know what."

We all held breath, listening, peering about. No sound came.

"Is it near?" I muttered.

"No. It may be gone now. I heard a small sound. Two sounds. Like this." He made a low, gasping grunt. "On the wind," he added. "Very faint."

We listened again. A cool wind was blowing from the north, and had brought the sounds some distance. We heard nothing more. But then one of my boys sniffed.

"Something dead," he mumbled. "I smell it."

The others took long, slow breaths. Then two of them grunted in the way that means: "It is true."

I tried, but I could not smell anything unusual. After a time I said:

"*Bien.* A dead thing can do no harm. When day comes we shall see."

Another man took the watch, and the rest of us lay down. None of us slept for a time, and the Indians muttered a bit to one another, but nothing more developed. Finally I dozed off.

Once more a hand shook me. As I sat up I found day dawning. The light was weak, and only the first of the birds had begun to make their noises, but the night was gone. As I sat up my Guahibo said:

"Men move. Watch."

Out on the road, half a dozen *soldados* were marching north, moving with quick steps and peering ahead. As I looked at them the Indian added:

"One shouted. None answered. They go to see."

A corporal of the night-guard, probably, had yelled for an "All's well!" and failed to get it. I had not known that a sentinel was posted to the north, but I could guess it now—and more too. Shoving my feet into my *alpargatas* and buckling my belt, I swung out and after the Funes men.

They did not notice me, nor did I notice that my Guahibos all had gotten up and followed me. The two parties of us walked along the road, saying nothing, until we reached the end of the short village. There the men ahead of us stopped short, all at once.

"*Dios mio!*" yelled one. "Both of them! And the bones—"

"*Cristo!*" howled another. "Is there no end to it? *Por Dios*, I will leave this cursed place! I will—"

"*Silencio!*" bawled a third—the corporal. "Shut your mouth!"

By that time I was among them. And I, too, halted short. There in the middle of the road was a bunch of bones—bones of men.

Two skulls, both split wide open at the crown; stark ribs, long arm and leg bones, and a few smaller ones—not all the bones of two men, but all the larger ones—they lay there in a huddle as if contemptuously dumped from some passing cart. They were clean white, without a spot of flesh anywhere; without even an odor, so far as I could perceive. The wind had changed, though, and now was blowing away from me. And I knew that these dead things were what the keen nostrils of my Guahibos had scented in the night.

After one look at them, the corporal scowled along the road and muttered something, then turned sharp about and walked to a big stone a few feet away. The rest of the men stood dumb, looking sick with fear. Now I saw that beyond those bones, in the thin dust of the road, were enormous tracks; human tracks, but ending in claw-prints instead of toe-marks. They led toward the Catañapo.

Another grumble from the corporal brought my attention back to him. Beside the big rock he had picked up a ragged straw sombrero. A yard or two away lay another. That was all that was left of the two outposts who had last been stationed at that stone to guard the northern approach to the pueblo.

The ogre had stolen up on those unlucky rascals who crouched there with loaded rifles, killed both of them without noise, and carried them off, taking also their guns and everything else except the hats. And as proof of what he would do to them—or perhaps as an insult to all their mates—he had left the bones of the sentries killed three nights before; yes, and had deliberately made his tracks in the road-dust. If I had not altogether believed in the diabolical creature before, I had to do it now. There was the whole story under my own eyes.

The corporal walked all around the stone, found no more signs, and came back, scowling at me. Saying nothing, I moved farther along, to look more closely at the tracks and measure them by my own. They went only a short distance along the road, leaving it at a bend; and from that point I could no longer follow them. Away from the cart-track the earth was baked hard as rock, and nothing showed. Even the claw-dents disappeared.

The prints in the road were nearly twice as big as my own. Estimating the size of the ogre by comparing his tracks and mine, I figured that he must be more than twelve feet tall!

For a minute I felt as shivery as the goose-fleshed bandits at the bone-pile. But as I went back to them I kept my mouth shut. The corporal had not yet ordered them to pick up the bones, and I squatted there a few minutes to examine them. The skulls, I noted, were not split cleanly, as if by a steel blade, but broken in a ragged way. They looked as if crushed in by a rough, sharp stone.

While I was looking at them, a brown hand came down and began feeling along a leg bone, and I looked up to find that my Guahibos had gathered around. Then came a snarl from the corporal:

"Get away from there, you dogs! You, Scott, take your animals away from the bones of white men!"

"You go to —— you yellow rat!" I growled back at him, straightening up. "White men? —— mestizos like yourself! Shut up, or you'll feel a real white man's fist in your face!"

He did shut up, too, though he had a gun and I had left mine at the hut. For a second or two he looked as if ready to murder me, but he thought it best not to try it. My Guahibos, after watching both of us a second, handled the bones again, examining them very carefully. When they stood up they said nothing, but looked toward the Catañapo.

I said nothing to them, either, but shook my head at the Funes chaps, who now were watching them curiously. Ciro stepped along the road, grunting with amazement as he viewed the huge tracks, but following them along to the bend where they disappeared. There he stopped a minute, bent low, and then began moving slowly over that stony soil where I had seen nothing at all. In that way he traveled some little distance, stopping at another rock—a small black one. There he seemed to pick up something. When he came back, though, his hands were empty and his face blank.

"What do you find, *Indio?*" asked the corporal, who had become interested in spite of his sourness.

Ciro just gave an upward wave of the hand, which doesn't mean anything. But the Funes bunch took it in another way.

"*Cra*, it is as usual—the *demonio* flew into the air!" exclaimed one.

"*Por Dios*, I know one man he will not fly off with," muttered another.

"I too," says a third. "Before night I will be somewhere else."

"Enough of that!" scolded the corporal. "Gather these bones! We must report."

With a nod to my own men I walked away, returning to the rancho. The Guahibos followed close. Back at our hut, I sat down and smoked, watching the Funes men plod past with the relics left by the ogre. They disappeared beyond the Otero house, heading for that of their *capitán*. As they went, the sun shot its first long rays across the town, and doors began to open.

"Ciro," said I then, "what do you think of this *tigre* that walks like a man?"

Ciro gave me a queer look. Then, coming closer, he told me just what he thought of that infernal creature; and he didn't call it a flying demon, or any other kind of demon. After that he reached inside his shirt—my boys always wear clothes when they come down river with me—and brought out something he had found beside that black rock. In about one minute, or less, I began to see light, or thought I did; a very dim one, but one that made me tell him:

"You go back to that place—now, at once, before others come—and look farther. *Vaya!*"

"Ump," says he, meaning "All right." Then he spoke one word to another chap and picked up my machete, and the two of them loped out into the sun, their eyes shining as if they were taking a hot trail.

They were gone some little time. My cook got breakfast, and old Otero came out, looking relieved when he found me safe and sound, and asking how soon I wished the carts to move. I told him there was no hurry, and added—

"The big bat took two more men last night, Tolomeo—the two at the north."

"*Cra!*" He started and stared. "Two more! And you were not—"

There he caught his tongue.

"No, I was not disturbed in any way. But I have seen his tracks, *viejito*, and I know what has been going on here. Now tell me, has this *ogro* taken any one but Funes men? Has any peaceable person of the pueblo been attacked?"

"No, Sixto, not yet," says he, glancing about to make sure nobody overheard. "It is only these *bandidos* who have been killed, thus far. Carlos Baltazar, now, one of my bullock drivers, he lay drunk in the road all one night and was unharmed, the very night of the killing of a guard at Salvajito. But do not tell this. Carlos fears he may be blamed in some way by Atroz if it is known that he was out that night. There would be no sense in accusing him, but Atroz is—he is *muy atroz*."

"Right," I agreed. "My mouth is shut. And perhaps you had best go in and not be seen talking to me just now. I shall inform you when the carts are wanted."

At that he scuttled away. I ate, smoked again, and waited for Ciro to return. As I waited I rather expected to be summoned before Atroz for questioning or consultation; but no word came from him. Perhaps the corporal thought it better not to tell his chief that I knew anything of the night's raid, or perhaps the *capitán* was too busy cursing and worrying to send for me yet. He had reason enough to worry, even if the ogre never captured him. Between killings and desertions his garrison was shrinking all the time, and before many days Coronel Funes must learn of it; and as soon as he knew Atroz had met a situation that he couldn't handle, Atroz would be a dead dog, officially if not literally.

When Ciro and his companion came back they looked as stolid as usual, but their eyes still were shining. And said Ciro:

"The man *tigre* went up the little black river."

"Along the bank?" I asked.

"No. On the water."

"Ah," said I. And I looked at the sun and at my pile of trade goods. Then I walked to Otero's door, called him, and asked—

"The canoes used for ferrying at the Catañapo are yours, yes?"

"*Sí.*"

"Well, I am minded to go fishing this

morning," says I. "Let your *peônes* put my goods into your spare room, and give me paddles, and I shall pick your best canoe at the crossing. If Atroz happens to send for me, say that I shall return later."

He gave me a curious look, but did as I requested. About a quarter-hour later my boys were paddling me up the little black river where the ogre had traveled in the night.

NOW that Rio Catañapo you know, is practically unknown, except for the few miles near Atures. It comes down out of the mountains where nobody lives but Indians—the Piaroas, mostly, though there are other tribes in there too—and beyond the short savanna it's very rough. There are some queer things up in those hills, and in the savanna too, for that matter. Right out in the open, about a league back from the road to Salvajito, is the Cerro Pintado—the Painted Hill—a huge rock inscribed with picture writing put there by nobody knows who; and somewhere near-by is a great cave-tomb full of bones; and there are other odd things, pretty weird in a way, known to some folks, and plenty more unknown to anybody.

Well, I had no intention of going very far, and no real expectation of trailing the ogre to his den, or even of finding any more sign of him; for a water trail is no trail at all. But I was decidedly curious, and a day spent poking around up there might be interesting. So the boys paddled slowly along, watching everything keenly as we moved, while I sat looking at the water ahead—the only thing I could look at, except the bush along the banks, too thick to see through. Once in a while a bird flew up or a butterfly floated past, and now and then the Guahibos spied a snake, but nothing else showed.

We kept on in this way for quite a long time, still seeing nothing worth while. The narrow river was slow, deep and smooth, except for big stones here and there. Finally it began to grow rougher, with a tiny rapid at times. Then, about midday, we came to the mouth of a *caño* flowing in from the north side. Just above it, in the main stream, was a mean *raudal*. The *caño*, on the other hand, looked smooth, and trees interlacing over it made cool shadow.

"We have gone far enough," I decided. "Paddle in there, and we shall eat and rest and then go back."

They paddled up the new stream a few rods. Then a little space clear of bush invited us ashore, and we landed. The boys, as usual, looked at everything around; but all was peaceful. So, after stretching ourselves, we squatted and went to eating some cassava and *carne seca.*

The Indians were a little glum over failing to find any trace of the man *tigre,* and ate in silence. After a little while, though, one of them glanced around and listened. Somewhere at a distance a parrot was squawking, but there was no other sound. I kept on chewing. But then another chap turned his head and peered into the bush. After a minute he said softly—

"Something watches."

We all stopped eating then, and as we squatted there I began to feel it too—that feeling of eyes watching me somewhere. If you've ever felt it you know how it is; if not, I can't tell you; it's a queer feeling, and not so comfortable. We kept dead still, but not a thing could we see or hear except the bush and the rustle of a little breeze.

"Well, let us see," said I, rising. "Spread out, and we shall go into the bush a little way. Pepe, stay here and watch across the water. The rest of you, come."

For a second or two the three who were to go with me hung back—they were unarmed, as I've said. But when I pushed into the bush with my gun ready they advanced with no more hesitation. It was quite thick and shadowy in there, and, although we were only a few feet apart, we lost sight of each other after a few steps. And it was a long time before I saw those fellows again.

I had just passed a big ceiba tree, with buttress roots forming open-ended rooms large enough to hold a dozen men, when something hit me. The world exploded and I was nowhere.

When things came together again I was moving through the air. Flat on my back, I was, with hands and feet bound and a cloth tied over my face. Some sort of stretcher or litter was under me, and leaves were rustling around me and brushing against my hair, and men were breathing hard from the strain of carrying my weight. My head ached miserably, and between the pain and the unusual sensation of riding jerkily on my back I felt sick. I began to struggle, trying to sit up or fall off, but found myself lashed to the litter. Then a voice growled, speaking words which I couldn't understand, but which brought action. A fierce blow on my head knocked me out again.

The next thing I felt was a drowning sensation. I choked, fought about, and found air coming to me. Then I was lying on the ground, on my side, and could see the bare legs of a number of Indians. My head and face were wet, my hands and feet still tied. Somehow I shoved myself up on an elbow, coughing, and got a good look around. A man stepped back from me, holding a huge water-gourd, now empty. It was that water, dumped on my face, that had revived me and half drowned me at once.

For a minute or two I was dizzy and didn't see very plainly. Then things steadied, and I blinked at about a dozen bare Indians I'd never seen before. A hard-faced bunch of *hombres* they were, too, watching me as if I were a snake they intended to kill. I had just about time to size them up before a voice spoke, sudden and sharp, at my back. It was a surprized, angry voice, rather shrill, spitting out a mouthful of that language that was new to me. The men all looked blank. I tried to turn my head far enough to see who spoke, lost my balance, and fell over on my back. And then I lay there without a move, too much astonished to try to rise again.

Standing over me was a woman; a young, light-skinned woman, wearing nothing but a tiny *guayuco*—bead apron. And she was the mountain girl who had been caught by Atroz two months ago and had drowned herself in the great *raudal!*

Yes, sir, that same girl whose eyes had followed me out of the Atroz house and down the Orinoco; the one I had meant to help if I could; this was she. And, for a girl who had been killed in the raving waters of the *raudal* and eaten by the crocodiles always waiting below, she was remarkably well preserved. Her eyes were snapping with temper, and the string of language she threw at the men was red-hot. The next second she dropped to a squat, gave me a push, and, as I rolled on my side, began yanking at the bush-rope binding my arms. Then a man came with a knife and cut it; cut the bonds on my legs, too, and gave me a hand to help me up.

Things whirled around me again, but once on my feet I stayed there, hearing the girl scold my rough captors while I grew steady. They were a crestfallen bunch when I looked at them again. One of them began mumbling what seemed some sort of excuse, but she cut him short. With one finger she tapped my face, and with the other hand she pointed at one of the men who was a good bit darker than the rest, talking furiously all the time. They all looked at that fellow, but at his skin rather than his face. And then she spoke a word that meant something to me.

"Atro," was the word, as she pronounced it. But I guessed that she meant "Atroz"; that she was telling them the skin of Atroz was as dark as that of the chap she had designated; and that she was lacing them for taking me for Atroz. By the same token I could perceive that the courteous *capitán* of Atures was wanted by this lady; and, knowing something of what he had done to her man, and to her also, I could easily understand why.

She stopped talking, and a glum silence followed. Then one of the men asked something, thrusting his chin toward me. She frowned at me as if perplexed, perhaps wondering what to do with me now that she had me. But then a swift smile flashed over her face, and she gave an answer. Several of them grinned. With no more words, they all went out.

She and I stood looking at each other, and she smiled again, more slowly this time. And in spite of my headache I woke up to the fact that she was actually handsome. Down in Atures, with a shapeless old dress on her body and sullen hate on her face, she hadn't been very attractive. But now, with her shapely figure unconcealed and eyes and lips both laughing—Well, I smiled right back at her.

"I am glad to meet you again, *chiquita,*" I remarked, "but much surprized. Men said you were dead."

Her smile faded and she looked uncomprehending. Evidently she knew very little Spanish. So I used signs. Pointing to her, I dropped my jaw, drooped limply, and looked dead. She caught my meaning at once, and answered in the same way. Jerking her hands about to imitate the writhing water of the big *raudal,* she took a few steps; stopped, pulled off an imaginary dress, and dropped it; crouched, stepped ahead very carefully, then turned sharp to the right and worked along in the same posture, swaying as if nearly losing balance; turned right again, looked and listened, and then ran a yard or two on her toes. A long wave of the hand finished the story, which was plain enough: She had faked a suicide at the *raudal*, leaving her dress behind and creeping down stream just off shore, until she could emerge and escape up the Catañapo, leaving no trail.

Then her expression turned a bit suspicious. Another long wave, and then, pointing at me, she asked: "*Porqué?*" Meaning, of course, why had I come there? Or rather, why had I come up the Catañapo?

Before answering that, I tried to learn how many Spanish words she had picked up, besides "*porqué*," while a prisoner; also, whether she could understand Guahibo, which I speak fairly well. The Indian words, I found, were reasonably intelligible to her, though not the same as those of her own tribe. Between the two languages, and the use of signs when words failed, we soon found that we could communicate quite readily. So then I explained why I had traveled up the little river.

First I made it quite plain, by saying "Atroz" and holding my nose, that I was no great friend of that gentleman. She seemed aware of that already, but I wanted it clearly understood. Then, with some difficulty, I told her that my Guahibos had trailed the giant raider of Atures to the Catañapo, and that I had followed from curiosity; that finally I had tired of the journey, gone ashore to eat before returning, and suddenly been attacked. She watched me closely, but seemed to believe my story. She asked, though, whether any other men followed me. I said no, and asked in turn what had become of my Guahibos. She smiled in an odd way and made no answer.

Looking around the place, I found no sign of my boys, nor much else. It was a small cave, dry and bare, well lighted by sunshine at an entrance a few paces away, but disappearing into a narrow dark corridor at the rear. After looking at me a minute or two without speaking again, the girl moved to that dark opening and faded away into it, leaving me to myself. I waited a little while, but she didn't come back. So I walked out into the sun to see what I might.

Outside was a cleared space—that is, clear of bush—with several plantain-leafed huts among the trees, and a few men lolling in hammocks. The place had the look of an Indian fishing-camp; a temporary settlement, not altogether new but not old, which could be deserted at any time. A couple of rods away, water gleamed in the sun; and somewhere far off at the right sounded the dull rumble of a small rapid or cataract. It was about as lazy and peaceful a scene as you could imagine. The hard gang that had brought me there had disappeared somewhere, and the loafers in the hammocks seemed to pay no attention to me when I came out. It looked as if I could do as I pleased. But looks are sometimes deceptive.

I walked down to the water, wondering if it was the *caño* on which I had been captured. It wasn't. It was just a wide pool in a little *cañito*—too wide to be natural, as I soon saw. At its lower end was a dam, made of sticks set close together, and, probably, of stones and mud below. It didn't interest me, and after a look at it and around it I walked back.

"Well, that's one way out, if I need to use it," says I to myself. "Water always runs down hill, and that brook must lead to the *caño* and so to the Catañapo."

Later on, though, I learned that I was wrong about that.

The lazy Indians all had sat up now and were watching me. Most of them lay down again, though, as I left the water. One chap continued to sit, keeping his eyes on me all the time. I went over to him and tried to talk, but met with no luck. The only answer he gave was when I asked whether they were Piaroas, and that answer was a short grunt meaning "No."

Just who they were is still an unsolved question in my mind. Probably they were of some unknown tribe from the mountains to the north of the Catañapo; the Piaroa country is more to the south. They were all rather grim-looking, and not friendly, even though they let me alone; strongly built, and of the warrior age. Not an old man nor a boy was in the camp, nor a woman either, except that one who seemed to control them.

That woman now reappeared at the cave entrance, standing there slender and straight and looking wonderfully white against the darkness. I left the dumb Indians. As I approached, she motioned sidewise with her head and walked away to the left. I followed. A little way off, among the trees, we entered a palm house which I had not seen before, and which was better than any of the shelters of the men; for it was well thatched and walled with the branches of the *chiquechique* palm. Inside were various cook-pots and such stuff, and a hammock slung across. She sat down in this hammock and I with her; there was no other place to sit. And then we talked for some time.

Talked, yes, in that laborious way which was our best. But I didn't learn much. In fact, I learned nothing at all about the things I most wanted to know; nothing about the giant, nothing about my Guahibos, nothing about my own probable future—except that I was not to go down the Catañapo for some time. She made this quite plain, and watched me with narrowed eyes to see how I took it. When I made it evident that I intended to go whenever I should feel so inclined, she just smiled oddly and said no more about it. She knew a way to hold me there.

About all I did learn was that her name was Matá—which, when I thought of it afterward, was very close, both in sound and meaning, to our Spanish verb *matar*, meaning "kill"; that the men in the camp took orders from her because she had been the wife of their young chief; and that she liked me pretty well. She didn't put that last into words, of course, but it wasn't necessary.

After a while she discovered the condition of my head, which I hadn't mentioned, but which was hurting me a good deal, both inside and out. At once she went outside, to come back presently with a handful of crushed leaves and some tiny vines; and, using the vines as strings, she tied the leaves in a pad on my gashed scalp, and then motioned for me to lie down and keep still. When I did so she left me again. Soon the pain began to grow easier, and I became drowsy in the hot stillness and fell asleep.

My siesta lasted until nearly sundown, when I sat up feeling much better. Matá had come in again, hung another hammock, and lain down, but she was not asleep; just lying there and watching me in a dreamy sort of way. Now she arose and uncovered a wide basketwork tray, and there was a good meal all ready for me; sweet bird-meat, cassava, and mangoes, along with a gourd bottle of cool, tart liquid that seemed to be water flavored with fruit juices. I ate like a starved dog, while she nibbled at one of the mangoes—the only thing she would take from the tray. While I was eating I determined that afterward I would make her tell me what I wanted to know, if it could be done. But when that time came it couldn't be done. That meal was my downfall.

What she had put into my food I don't know, but I can make a guess. There is some sort of jungle drug, known to some of the Indians, which robs a man of his initiative. It doesn't impair his physical strength to any extent, but dulls his mind and practically paralyzes his will. As long as he is kept under its influence he'll do almost anything he's told to do. Its effect probably varies with the strength of the dose; if it's very strong he is practically an idiot until its hold weakens, and if he should be kept that way too long he might remain in that condition permanently. Also, if it's strong enough, he can't remember afterward what he did, or where he was, or anything else about his period of mental slavery.

Well, it was that drug, or something of the same sort, that Matá put into that first meal of mine and kept feeding to me afterward. I'm convinced of it, partly because of the knowledge of medicine she showed in healing my head, and partly because there's no other explanation for my condition thereafter. She didn't make the doses strong enough to turn me into a witless fool, perhaps because she wanted me to remain a man instead of to become a beast; but she gave me enough to hold me a prisoner as securely as if I were chained in a dungeon. Maybe her intention was to keep me that way until she and her gang moved back into the mountains, taking me with them, to some place so difficult of exit that I'd never find my way out again.

Anyway, as I've said, she didn't make my medicine strong enough to blot out all memory or reason. Quite a bit of what took place after that stuck in my mind.

For the time I was in a sort of semi-stupor. It came on me very soon after that meal and remained through nights and days after that. I understood things pretty well, but I couldn't think long about anything. A weight was on my brain, and when I tried to think, it would struggle a minute and then quit, leaving me staring and feeling lost. Even the occurrences that made a sharp impression for a few minutes grew vague very soon, and if I tried to establish the connection between one thing and another it was a useless effort. I just took things as they came and let them go, and most of them were pleasant enough. Matá made them so. I did whatever she desired me to; I couldn't do otherwise, and maybe I wouldn't have wanted to, anyway.

After that first night I was allowed to do whatever I pleased, with one or two exceptions. I couldn't ramble away very far—I had no desire to, anyway—and I couldn't bathe in the large pool. There was always a man or two near me when I walked about, and if I went too far out into the woods they would turn me about and swing me back. As for the bathing, they saw to it that I did this at a little hole some distance upstream from the pond. They took their own baths at the same spot. Nobody ever entered that dammed place nearest the huts. Nobody told me why, but it was clearly forbidden.

About the second day I wandered into the cave where Matá had found me. The dark passage at the back attracted me, and I felt my way along it. After some distance it grew brighter and suddenly let me out in a queer place; a cavity without a roof, rock-walled, into which the sun streamed hot. In the middle of this hole was a pole table, such as Indians use for broiling tapir meat, and on it lay bones. They were human bones; the larger bones of two men, the skulls split, the others absolutely bare of flesh; all dried, or drying, in the direct heat of the overhead sun. The sight jolted me a minute. My brain woke up and told me these were the bones of the two fellows carried off by the ogre that night while I slept in Atures.

Before my head grew dull again I spied a small alcove in the stone wall beyond, and, in that niche, a row of rifles. Stepping over to these, I grabbed them in turn and worked the action, finding all empty. There might have been a dozen of them, more or less, all of the type used by the Funes army. Lying below them were several revolvers. These, too, were empty. Not a cartridge was in the place, so not a gun was useful. No poniards or machetes were there, either. Afterward I saw some among the Indian huts outside.

On turning away from the gun-closet I found an Indian standing at the cavern entrance, watching me with a sarcastic smile. Probably I grinned back and went out with him, but I don't remember; my mind must have gone back to its doze about that time.

It may have been that night, or the next, when I woke in the palm house and heard voices calling and laughing fiercely outside. Thin moonlight was shining at the doorway. Matá was gone. My head felt quite clear; probably the time was near morning and the supper dose of drug had grown weak in me. Anyway, I remember this quite well. I got up and walked out, stopping outside the door. Just then came a loud splash, followed by another; then a wild yell of many voices—a savage, triumphant yell that stirred my hair. After that all was quiet. Dark figures moved among the trees and disappeared. I was still standing there, my mind groping for something and not quite grasping it, when from nowhere at all came Matá.

She was standing there beside me, watching me with eyes narrow and hard, before I realized that she had come. Her expression was unpleasant; almost hateful, as it had been when I first saw her in the house of Atroz. But, as then, her feeling was not against me. After regarding me a short time she smiled slightly, took my arm, and drew me into the house. I asked a question or two, but got no answer. Soon I was asleep again.

She must have made the doses somewhat stronger after that, for things were more foggy for a while. But I can remember being in the hidden bone-drying cavern several times, and finding new bones each time, in varying numbers. Once only one man's skull was there; once there were three; at other times two. The number of rifles grew, too, but never a cartridge was in any of them. Whoever concealed the guns—Matá, probably—made sure that they were left unserviceable.

If there was any more yelling in the night, any more splashing, I did not hear it. I slept too soundly. And no twelve-foot giant ever moved among those men of Matá's. Men came and went; sometimes they were few, sometimes quite numerous; but they were all of the same size and type, muscular, hard-eyed and hard-mouthed, grinning contemptuously at me, the hulking white man a head taller than any of them, yet the helpless slave to a woman's fancy.

It may have been those sneering grins that cut through to my submerged reason—I can see them yet at times, and I swear every time—or it may have been a slip by Matá in doping me, or both of these together, that brought a little clear thought back to my head. Anyway, I woke up again in the night, after a dream of being tortured by those grinning Indians; and for a few minutes I felt more wide awake, more alive, than for some time past. In that time I realized something of my condition and caught a glimpse of the cause of it. And straightway I stamped on my brain a resolution that stayed with me.

"I will not eat!"

Just that. I was still pounding it into myself, I suppose, when I lost myself again. At any rate, it was still there at daybreak, when I got up. I was rather hazy then as to why I shouldn't eat, but still determined not to. Neither did I drink—not the stuff Matá gave me. I walked out and up the *cañito,* and there I drank clear water, lots of it. And I stayed there nearly all day, eating nothing at all, and drinking all the water I could swallow. By night my mind was more active than it had been for at least a week.

Matá was none too well pleased, you may be sure. But there was nothing she could do about it. Early in the day I had sense enough to pretend that I was sick, so that my water-drinking and my refusal to eat were more or less plausible. She made up some sort of remedy for me, and no doubt it was a good one for stomach trouble; but I wouldn't take it. She tried to coax me, and then to pull me, back to my hammock; but I wouldn't go. Men came and looked at me and argued about me, and a couple of them became a bit rough and would have forced me to the house, but I heaved both of them into the *cañito,* where they were unmercifully laughed at by the rest. They were ready to kill me for that, but Matá ordered them away, and they went. After that I was left in peace, except for several more coaxings by the girl, which did her no good.

At sundown I had been twenty-four hours without food—or drugs—and had given my interior the best washing it ever had. And my head was fairly well cleaned, too, though not yet so clear as usual. When I returned to the palm house, though, I acted dull and listless. Matá had a tempting meal ready, and I was hungry enough to cat it all. But I made a face as if the sight of food sickened me, and lay down in the hammock with my back to it. She coaxed and teased, commanded and scolded, but with no luck. I groaned and pushed her away, and then lay like a log until she gave me up again.

That night was very quiet. For a time I slept, though not very soundly; I was too empty. Later on I lay awake for an hour or two, able to think without effort. Recalling most of the things that had recently come about, I put them together and solved most of the mystery—though not all of it—connected with the raiding of Atures.

Matá, escaping from Atroz with vindictive hatred in her heart, had made her way back to her people; brought a gang of men down here, established this camp, and begun a systematic war of revenge on the Funes garrison. Her people were bow-and-arrow Indians, too few and too poorly armed to make an open attack on the riflemen and massacre them; so they were carrying on stealthy night raids, killing a man here and a couple there, striking now at the outposts and now at the pueblo, and taking away their victims every time. Their real object was, of course, to get Atroz. To do this they were terrorizing his force and wearing it down, by death and desertion, to the point where it would no longer safeguard him. It was plain, too, that they—or, at any rate, Matá—wanted him alive, not dead. Otherwise I, mistaken for him, would have been killed at the *caño* instead of carried to camp. Whenever they did get him, something very unpleasant was in store for the man who had tortured their young chief to death and maltreated his woman. And they didn't care how long it might take to capture him. Even if Funes reinforcements should come, they could kill the new men as easily as their predecessors. They were expert killers, those mountain Indians. No doubt they had spies posted in the woods near the pueblo, and when the giant and his company paddled down the Cantañapo at night they found the night's program of attack all arranged.

But what about that giant, and the devouring of the dead men, and the returning of their remarkably clean bones? I could answer only the last part of that question. The bones were carried back to Atures as a part of the campaign of frightfulness. But the man-eating colossus was as mysterious as ever. Remembering the splashes in the night, I felt that he must live in that dammed pool which nobody entered. But that would be impossible, unless he were some monstrous creature half human and half reptilian. Besides, the fresh bones I had seen here had been in that open-topped cave, not at the pond.

Well, I would keep my mind as clear as possible and learn what I could. I knew I should have to eat something in the morning, though, to allay suspicion. But I saw a way to do that and still keep my wits.

So, when day came and another tempting meal was put before me, I gobbled it at top speed. Matá watched with evident satisfaction, and when I walked out immediately afterward she gave no more attention to me. I went straight into the woods, put a finger down my throat, and forced myself to throw up all I'd eaten. Then I walked over to the *cañito* and filled myself with water.

For a little while I felt rather sickish and dull, and drowsed at the foot of a tree. While I lounged there one of the Indians came up, looked at me, grinned, and went back. Probably Matá had given me a strong dose that morning, and he reported to her that I was drunk from it. At any rate, I was left unwatched after that, and when my sluggishness passed off—as it soon did—nobody saw me arise and go.

Luck guided me that morning. My main idea at the time was to find and eat some undoctored food. A man can go a long time without eating, of course, if he has plenty of water; but it's not a comfortable experience. I figured that there must be some small storehouse for the cassava and such stuff, and that I'd better locate it. So I went into the bush, working up a steep slope and toward the rear of the camp. Then I found a faint footpath, and followed it. It led back for quite a distance through thick bush. Suddenly it ended at a cave-mouth—so suddenly that I was almost in the opening before I knew it. And just inside it squatted two Indians, who stared at me, then jumped up with quick grins. Both of them were my own Guahibos.

"*Ajo!*" I exclaimed. "Where have you—"

There they stopped me with hands upraised for silence. After looking quickly about them and listening for a few seconds, one of them cautioned:

"Speak quietly, *Capitán*. Men guard us."

"Where are they?"

"One went to hunt. The other walked to the camp. Either may come back any time. They are bad."

"How bad?"

"They killed Pepe. He tried to run away. We are slaves."

I growled something to myself, then said to the nearest—

"You come out and watch while I talk to Noé."

He came out a little way, and I stepped inside. Of Noé I asked, "Have you food?"

"Yes, *Capitán*. Are you hungry?"

"I starve. Bring something."

He ran back inside, to return quickly with a half-eaten monkey haunch, which I began gnawing. Between bites I asked what they did there.

"We work at whatever they give us," he said. "They take us to the *caño* when they go out to raid. They tie us up there and leave us, with one to watch us. When they come back they make us carry the dead men to the camp. It is hard work. They made us carry you, too, that day we were caught. Then they drove us up here. We thought you were dead."

"Not yet," said I, gulping more meat. "You do not work about the camp, or you would have seen me."

"No, we can not go there. Here we care for the big fool. He is filthy, and we must clean—"

"Big fool?" I cut in. "Who?"

"The man of big feet. You know."

I came near choking myself then. A half-swallowed piece of monkey flesh stuck in my throat as I caught his meaning. The giant! The ogre! He was here!

I coughed up the meat, making considerable noise, though I tried to be quiet. Noé looked worried. When my voice came back I gasped—

"Here?"

Noé said nothing, looking out and listening. Before he decided to speak the giant answered for him.

Somewhere inside the place sounded a mumbling voice of somebody disturbed by my coughing. It approached, grunting and grumbling, more like the noises of an animal than the words of a human being. And then into the light came the strangest thing I ever saw in the shape of a man.

He was an Indian, and huge. But he was not twelve feet tall; no higher than I am, if as high. His size was in his width and thickness. Body, arms, and legs were as wide as those of any two men. And his bulk was not that of fat—that is, not fat alone, though he was big-bellied; it was that of enormously thick bones and a barrel chest overlaid by meat. And the most monstrous parts of him were his hands and feet. The hands, at the ends of overlong arms, hung below his knees, each big enough to close around the whole head of an average man, as yours or mine would close on a pipe-bowl. The feet—well, I've told you the size of their tracks: gigantic.

Aside from their tremendous size, though, they were usual human feet, with five toes and no claws. Looking at them, I remembered what my men had learned about them down at Atures. There the ogre had lost a set of his claws, and that was what Ciro had found at the black rock. They were sharp stones set into a notched stick, with cords to lash the stick to the tops of his toes; the stones fitted between his toes, and the stick held the toes off the ground, so that as he walked he gouged the soil but left no toe-marks. After making his demon-tracks he could pull off the claw-sticks and walk as usual on hard soil, leaving traces so faint that only the eyes of a trailing Indian could ever discern them. And if he had not chanced to stumble over a rock in the darkness that night and drop claws where my Guahibo discovered them, we never should have followed him, for my boys would have believed him to be a sure-enough *demonio*. As it was, they scented trickery at once.

All this passed through my mind in almost no time, and then I looked again at his head. No, it wasn't a huge, horrifying head, red-eyed and ferocious. Compared to the rest of him it was absurdly small; not much larger than that of a child. And its expression was even more incongruous. The beady little eyes looked peevish, yet placating, almost cringing, as they met my hard stare; and the vapid, drooping mouth moved uncertainly, making no noises now. What Nature had put into his overgrown body she had taken away from his brain. He wasn't a downright idiot, but certainly not more than half-witted.

As I thought of the twelve-foot terror I had pictured I had to grin. At once the creature grinned back, grinned wide, chuckling in an infantile way. And I saw that his upper jaw held no teeth. That's a common condition among our Indians, as you may have noticed. But to find this man-eating, bone-gnawing monstrosity minus the teeth to eat or gnaw with—that capped the climax. Poor beggar, he couldn't bite off a mouthful of meat to save his life.

But, meat-eater or not, he was powerful—though he didn't know his strength. While I grinned at him he stepped closer and gave me a playful tap on the chest. Only a tap, that's all it was—to him. But it nearly knocked me down. If he should ever strike a man in earnest, that man would be dead on his feet. But I doubt if he ever did. I don't believe he had killed a man of the Funes gang. He was just a poor tool used by Matá to simulate a demon by making tracks, and perhaps used by his companions as beast of burden to transport the dead men to the waiting canoe at the Catañapo. It would require a much keener intelligence than his to creep up on two armed sentries and kill them without even time for a shot or a yell.

Noé spoke sharply to him when I staggered, and he looked vacantly at my man, as if wondering what he'd done wrong. When Noé pointed to the gloom he turned obediently and faded away into his den, as docile as a child—more docile than most. And in spite of his uncouth proportions he moved without the slightest sound. Those great feet made no more impact on the ground than the fall of a feather.

When he was gone I said:

"*Ajo!* So that is the *tigre* that walks like a man! He is more like a tapir. But, Noé, what is it that eats the men brought here?"

"*Caribes*," he answered.

"*Caribes!*"

"Yes, *Capitán*. The pond down yonder is full of them. Men throw in the dead. The fish eat. When the bones are clean they are raked out and dried."

"*Dios mio!*" I marveled. "But how come *caribes* in that tiny *cañito?*"

"Men say they were brought from the river."

So that ended the mystery of the ogre. That explained the stripping of the bones.

Caribes, you know, go mad when they taste blood, and chop at meat until none is left; they would chop up the bones, too, if they could. True enough, as I had thought last night, the ogre did live in that pool; a hundred of him, probably. And that eating part of the ogre, like this walking part here in the cave, was born from the brain of Matá, beyond a doubt. She had caused that dam to be built; the fish to be trapped and brought there; the bodies to be devoured; the bones to be carried back, and all the rest of it—even to the splitting of the skulls, so that the brains of the Funes men might become fish-food! A savagely vindictive touch, that last. And an exceedingly dangerous young woman, Matá; a tigress.

And, though that tigress had been gentle with me until now and might continue so a while longer, the time might not be far off when she might tear out my throat. Tigresses are likely to turn on you sooner or later. In this case it probably would be sooner; as soon as she discovered that I was aware of her drugging practice and getting out of hand. I couldn't deceive her long. And when she found that I meant to leave her—

It would be better all around, I felt, if she didn't find it out until I had already left her. So far as she personally was concerned, I could break her neck with one hand if I wanted to. But I didn't want to. And I could hardly break through all her hard gang afterward. And now that I had satisfied my curiosity most thoroughly, it was expedient to go with no unnecessary delay.

"Where is Ciro?" I asked.

"He went with the hunter, to bring back the game," explained Noé.

"*Bien.* We had better leave this place tonight. Tell Ciro when he comes. Can you three slip away from your guards when all sleep?"

He grinned, his eyes shining.

"Unless they are to raid tonight," he agreed. "If we stay here—"

His finger moved in the way that means a cut throat. And he didn't mean his own throat, you can bet.

"*Bien,*" said I again. "There is a palm house with walls. Find it. Step softly. I shall be awake. Then we all go. You know the road to the *caño*?"

"I know it well."

"And at the *caño* are canoes?"

"Yes. And paddles."

"*Bueno!* I know where guns are. Do you know where the bullets are kept?"

"No. Not here."

"Well, perhaps I can find them. If I cannot, we go with no gun. We must go craftily. If we fail, we never go."

"We go," was all his reply.

I nodded and stepped out. Just then the other fellow sprang to us, hoarsely warning me:

"Go! Men come."

He gestured for me to take the path by which I had come. Then he muttered to Noé, who jumped out at him. They grappled and thrashed about in the bush, pretending to fight, and making more than enough noise to drown any rustlings I made as I swung away. I was gone in no time, unseen and unheard.

Back I went to the tree beside the *cañito*, to sit again and think things over. My mind was clear enough now, and working fast. My next step must be to try to find cartridges, which probably were hidden in another of those little caves which seemed numerous thereabouts; then, if I found them, to sneak a rifle out of the arsenal and hide it where it could be quickly picked up. Although I intended to slip away that night without disturbance, a gun might prove very useful before we could reach Atures. In fact, I decided that even if no cartridges could be found I would still take a gun; my own, if I could find it. With this in mind I was just about to rise and go to camp when I heard a rustle of leaves. At once I assumed a dull expression and sat limp and sluggish.

Through the bush came Matá. I blinked up at her as vacantly as possible. Standing beside me, she returned my gaze smilingly, but with something of contempt in her face, too. No woman has much respect for a man altogether her slave, even if she still likes him; and it was plain enough to me that, although she was not yet tired of me, her interest was waning somewhat.

Just at present, though, she was in a rather playful mood, and proceeded to amuse herself with me. Sinking down beside me, she pushed me about, twisted my hair into horns, and in general treated me like a big doll, laughing at my foolish appearance and actions. When she tired of that she snuggled against me and chattered away about something or nothing—I don't know what, for she used her own language, and seemed to enjoy hearing herself talk. Once in a while I said something, but always broke off and scowled as if forgetting what I meant to say, and she laughed merrily. For the time she seemed hardly more than a child playing a thoughtless game.

Meanwhile the forenoon was sliding away and I was accomplishing nothing. For a few minutes I considered the plan of suddenly turning tables on her, making her my captive, holding her as hostage and compelling her to go with me and my Guahibos, in full daylight, to the *caño*. But I knew it wouldn't work. She would meet violence with violence, and her men would finish me *pronto*. So, giving up that idea, I began to wonder how I could plausibly avoid eating at midday. The answer to that problem came most unexpectedly.

Suddenly over at the camp out broke a riot of noise that made us both jump. Wild yells and roars and screams blended in a savage chorus of either fear or joy—I couldn't tell which. For a second or two I thought the place had been found and attacked by Funes men. But there were no shots. Then Matá, listening, voiced a quick cry and leaped up. At top speed she dashed away, leaving me there like a forgotten toy.

I followed, though not so fast. Before I reached the huts the yelling had died to scattered calls and an excited rumble; and when I came among the Indians they had grown almost silent, only a grunt or two sounding here and there. They were crowded together now, bunched before the entrance to that cavern where I had been dumped on the dirt when brought here. All were looking intently inward, those behind standing on toes and stretching necks in useless effort to see what was within. The entrance was jammed, and outside men were packed in a solid mass. I stopped at the rear, looking over the intervening heads but unable to make out what took place in the dimness beyond.

Then, from in there, came the voice of Matá, high with fierce triumph, sneering, jeering, taunting in tones that could mean only one thing. Before I heard his name—as I speedily did—I knew who was now lying on that floor.

"Atro," came her stinging voice; and again "Atro!" At last the Indians had caught Atroz.

Yes, they had caught him in broad daylight; caught him at a time when they least expected it. Later I heard that, just after sunrise that morning, he had walked a little way into a bit of forest behind the pueblo—just why, nobody knew; perhaps to try to think undisturbed. Since it was day, and the ogre walked only at night, he must have thought himself safe enough. Besides, he wore two revolvers and a poniard. But he never came out, and when *soldados* searched they found only a blood-stained stone lying near the spot where he had rested. No doubt the Indian spies had been lurking in those woods, and, seeing their chance, crept up and knocked him senseless with that stone.

So here he was, at last, captive of the woman whose mate he had tortured to death before her eyes, and on whom he had practised such cruelty as his atrocious name and reputation would indicate. And she was mocking him with the merciless malice of long-awaited revenge. Her words probably meant little to him, as to me, but her voice and face must have made him cringe. If he made any answer it was too weak to be heard outside. Probably he could not find his voice. This girl, he had supposed, was dead long since; and to find himself now in her power must have shocked him dumb.

Then her revilings stopped. A few short words followed. A buzz of excitement went among the listening Indians, and they pushed and stretched higher to see. From inside now came the voice of Atroz, groaning out words of frightful panic. Then a gasping, gargling yell, as if choking. A coughing, moaning noise. After that hoarse howls of agony—howl after howl that made me sweat cold. Then moans; long, shuddering moans.

Without seeing, I knew Matá was giving him a taste of his own medicine; making him feel some of the pain he had enjoyed so much when he inflicted it on others. Whatever she was doing to him was no worse than he had done to her own man; probably it was the very same thing. But it was unpleasant to me when I only heard it—more so when I saw it.

The herd of Indians pressed back and broke into two sections, leaving a way open from the cave. Two other Indians came out, hauling at a rope. At the end of the rope came Atroz, staggering, stumbling, with more men shoving him from behind. And a ghastly sight he was. Stark naked, roped around the neck, arms tied behind him—but that was nothing. His mouth was cut back to his ears. His jaw hung loose. He made hoarse, horrible sounds without sense, showing that his tongue was gone. Yes, that tongue which had ordered death or torment to man or woman and jeered at their agony—it was cut away. And Matá hadn't stopped at his mouth, either.

Matá came after him, both hands red to the wrists. She still gripped a red knife. Her dark eyes, her gleaming teeth, were like those of a tigress at its kill. The little girl who had played with me just now was gone, and in her place walked a she-devil.

I felt sick, and turned to walk away. As I did so I bumped a huge shape at my left. It was that of the giant-footed freak, who now chuckled at me as he met my eye. Behind him were all three of my Guahibo boys. The uproar at the camp had brought down the slave-keepers, no doubt, and these fellows had followed. The capture of Atroz had broken all bonds and made a holiday for every one.

Why didn't I interfere? *Hombre*, I'm no man's fool. Atroz was as good as dead already, and the sooner the better for him and everybody else. If I interfered I'd be through, *pronto*, and serve me right. Some day I may get killed trying to defend somebody, but if I do it will be for a better man than Atroz. Until then I take care of Sixto Scott.

And I began looking out for this man Scott right then, for I saw my chance. Every eye was on the spectacle. One more look at the pitiless face of Matá, and I spoke low to Noé.

"We go now. None watches. Walk fast, but don't run."

He shot one glance around, nudged Ciro and the other, and walked away. To my surprize, he went in the direction of his cave, up-hill, not down along the *cañito*. But I followed. Moving fast, but not too fast, we dodged among trees until we were several rods away. Then Noé grunted—

"We go."

With the boys ahead, I ran up the path to the caveman's den; turned sharp past it, and followed another trace, climbing, always climbing. It was stiff work, and I had to grit my teeth to hold the pace. Just as my knees seemed giving out we found level ground, dropping sharply at one side. There we paused, all blown.

"Look," panted Ciro, pointing. And, following his finger, I found that we could see almost straight down to the dammed pool, a good way below us now. And I saw more than that.

The Indians were doing something at the pool, throwing something at a bare tree-branch above it. Then they crowded at the edge and did something else. Soon a huge figure, recognizable even up here as that of the strong fool, began pulling. Out over the water swung another shape, to hang there squirming. Shading my eyes and peering hard, I made out what was taking place.

Atroz still was entertaining. Matá had stopped the slapping for a more ingenious game. Her men had thrown a rope over the limb, tied his hands and feet together, swung him out, and lowered him, face down, to a point just above the surface. Now that quiet water was boiling and splashing around him, and he was writhing in useless struggles. It was the last act in his black drama. The ogre had him at both ends of his rope now; and when the outer end of the rope sank into the water Atroz would be nothing but a name.

"Let's go," said I. And we went fast.

That was the crest of the hill, and after we crossed the top the rest of our road was all down-grade. It was not very long, either, though it seemed that we had run for hours when we reached the *caño*. Three canoes were there—one of them our own—and as soon as the paddles were found we dug out of there with all speed. And we stopped for nothing until we reached Atures.

The Indians must have pursued us, but we had so long a lead that they never sighted us. Nobody thought of us, of course, until Atroz had ceased to hold their interest. How Matá felt about our unceremonious exit I didn't know, but I could guess. And that night I and all my men slept inside the walls of Tolomeo Otero.

I hardly think, though, that our recent hosts hunted us in Atures after dark. Probably they thought I would tell the *soldados* there the whole story and the riflemen would be ready for them—though hardly a corporal's guard now was left in the pueblo. And the chances are that before sundown they had abandoned camp and started back toward their home somewhere in the unknown mountains. Their work was done, and, with me loose to tell the tale, common sense would urge them to *vamose*.

As a matter of fact, I didn't tell all I knew, though I let out enough to make it clear that Atroz would never come back. Nobody mourned him, either—I least of all, when I learned that in my absence he had drunk up all my Maracaibo.

Everybody had thought I was dead, of course, and my return was a three days' wonder. Otero, to whom I told more of the story than to anybody else, made a greater wonder of it. He either imagined a good deal or deliberately twisted what I said; and the yarn he handed out was to the effect that, after long trailing of the giant ogre, I had caught him eating Atroz, and killed him. People believed it, too, and I didn't deny it. I was in haste to resume my journey home, and they could believe what they liked.

Otero is dead now, and the Funes army broken up and gone, but the story lives on, and sometimes somebody tells it to a newcomer at Atures. That's why I thought you might have heard it. But the ogre really was just what I've told you—a poor freak of Nature, a pool of fish, and a vengeful woman. And sometimes now, when I'm making the Atures portage, I look up the Catañapo and wonder where Matá and her monster are and how life is treating them. She wasn't such a bad sort, Matá. Aside from her trick of doping me, which is easily forgiven, she was very kind to me; and maybe, if I should hunt her up, she might be so again. But I never go up the Catañapo to find out. I wish her well—at a long distance.

SAM PLAYS SAFE

by Kingsley Moses

TRAGEDY, comedy, murder, burlesque often follow one another in immediate sequence. So it happened to me on the freighter *North King* steaming due west toward the Straits of Gibraltar.

It was just six o'clock in the morning and the empty Mediterranean was flat and shining under the new light of a cold January dawn. My hand had scarcely dropped the lanyard which struck four bells when the captain came tramping into the wheelhouse. Far off to the right was the rugged brown bulk of Sardinia.

"Can you sew up a cut?" demanded the captain grimly.

I looked at him astonished. Aft, so far as I knew, there had been no rumor of disturbance; no life on deck at all, in fact, at this early hour. We were headed home in ballast and there was little for the crew to do. At the moment I was myself at the wheel, holding the *North King* due west; for though I was returning from Naples to America as a consular passenger, the guest of the captain, we had cleared from port very short-handed indeed and every able man was needed to fill the watches. I had readily volunteered to take a trick at the wheel—the pleasant four to eight watch.

To the captain's abrupt question I answered dubiously— "I don't know."

"Well, he's bleeding to death. You'll have to try," was all the captain said. "Come on."

Down in the captain's private cabin, immediately below the bridge, we found the injured man. He was a big Danish sailor, the regular quartermaster of the ship. Groaning hoarsely, he sat slumped down in an armchair. And his face—a nasty sight it was! Blood, from a great jagged slash which ran from the left corner of his mouth half up to his ear, was streaming down his neck and across his bare chest. The cheek had been slit clear through; and tongue and teeth were visible beneath the fast-bleeding slash.

Twenty-four hours from any medical assistance, with a crew composed entirely of ignorant foreigners, my amateur aid was the only alternative. The man could not be allowed to bleed to death. With some silk thread and a common needle from the carpenter's chest, sterilized in boiling water, I took a dozen stitches in the unfortunate quartermaster's cheek while two husky sailormen held him in his chair. He stood it without a murmur; though his big body writhed convulsively with the pain.

We got the Dane into his bunk, provided him with a glass tube through which he could suck soup and milk—for to bind up the wound I had had nearly to stitch up his mouth—and then hurried back to the cabin.

"How did it happen?" I inquired, relieved to have the gory job finished.

The captain was on his knees, his back toward me as he fumbled in his locker.

"Had a fight with Sam the cook," he grunted. "Called him some sort of a dirty name, I suppose, and the cook grabs a heavy crockery cup, smashes it off at the handle and drives the jagged fragment clear through the Dane's cheek. Crazy mad. You know those West Indian niggers."

"Going to arrest him?"

"Right now." In the captain's hand was a revolver and a pair of handcuffs.

"Need help?" I wasn't crazy about the job; but there seemed nothing else to do but to offer, at least.

"No. Do it myself.

The captain toiled up the companionway steps, dragging himself painfully with his hands on the rails. He went into the galley. And instantly a pistol shot sounded. Out of the galley door, backward, stumblingly came the figure of the captain; with a big, black man following and reaching for his throat. The captain, off balance, staggered and fell to the deck. Above him towered the form of the huge West Indian cook. And in the hand of Sam the cook was the captain's revolver.

Instinct, rather than any definite plan or purpose, directed me then. The cook was as large as I—and I am a big man. He was infinitely stronger, I guessed, with sinewy arms that hung down to his knees like the arms of a gorilla. And he was armed.

Nevertheless I went aft across that well-deck as if I were flying. Behind me, from the flying bridge, I heard the mate call that he was coming. But it would be a minute, perhaps, before he could catch up.

Had I stopped to think I should doubtless have hesitated. What chance had I under the circumstances? The big negro was ten feet above me, commanding the top of the ladder. Fortunately I didn't think—just acted on impulse.

As I came to the foot of the after companionway the negro stood directly above me, the revolver pointed down at my head. I leaped for the companionway. He fired.

Why the shot went wild I can not tell. The muzzle of the gun couldn't have been three feet from the top of my head. But he did miss; and the next instant I had reached the top step and dived. Against all football principles I chose to go high, plunging for his neck. Together we crashed down upon the rough iron plates of the deck.

Happily I had secured a strangling grip around the big fellow's throat. For though I could not stay on top of him as we rolled and thrashed and bumped across the plates, nor could I pin him down, so great was his strength, yet, on the other hand, his clawing hands could not reach my neck or face.

Any instant, nevertheless, I expected to hear the revolver explode; to feel the tearing burn of the bullet in my body. I could hope only that, violently wrestling as we were, the ball wouldn't hit a vital spot. I did not dare let go his head and throat to try to grab his right hand. Once I relaxed that strangling grip I knew he could prove himself the more powerful man. His arms, as they convulsively squeezed my body, were incredibly strong. I felt that my ribs must pop out through my skin.

Yet the man didn't use the revolver. I couldn't understand that; and I was thinking perfectly clearly and analytically now, the first passion of anger past. Clinging to his head and throat as a halfback clings to a football I was lashed back and forth against the nubby iron plates. But a bruise or two isn't to be considered when you're waiting to get plugged by a bullet.

And then, suddenly as it had begun, the fight was over. The mate had arrived. Together we managed to pin down the raving negro, handcuff him and hustle him forward to the brig.

The captain had been scratched only, a bullet ploughing through the lobe of his ear. We decided to cross-question the prisoner. In the dark little cubby where we'd locked him he was cowed now, humble enough. Like most of the colored boys his anger was a flash of the moment.

"But why didn't you shoot me, Sam?" I questioned finally.

"When I missed yuh I throwed away the gun, boss," was his amazing answer.

"Threw it away? Into the ocean?"

"Sure. Yuh're fum N'Yawk, too. Yuh know thet there Sullivan Law. Don't catch this Sam totin' no deadly weapins."

Clipt Wings

A story of the Air-Mail Service

by

Andrew A. Caffrey

"THIS," said ex-pilot Rutter, "is what the public eats." The speaker, a former pilot of the air-mail service, shouldered his way a little deeper into the pillows and pursued the news article of which he spoke.

The evening paper—my evening paper, which Rutter was reading in my bed—featured, in big black headlines, the story of an air-mail pilot and his passenger reported lost in the Nevadan desert. The missing plane, carrying a magazine writer on a coast-to-coast publicity flight, was of a new type and its pilot had failed to make Reno as per schedule.

"Air-mail gets lots of publicity of the wrong kind," I remarked with more or less bile.

"All-same whisky," Rutter yawned, "there's no such thing as bad publicity. This looks bad for the pilot and magazine dude, but, in some way, shape or manner, old Colonel Googan will stand in the way of the boomerang and get smote for and by many columns of publicity before the lost are found." Then Rutter said certain unprintable things about Googan and that official's love of publicity.

Weeks before, when Rutter was let out of air-mail by the back door, instead of going down the road kicking stones and talking to self, the indolent nut had waxed happy. He said that it was all in the game; said that any bird could quit a job, but—Well, when a guy got fired, at least, he must have done something to get that way. He had.

Breaking the flying rules of air-mail had always been Rutter's greatest pleasure. Getting fired and rehired was old stuff with him. But this time, canning Rutter from a mid-West assignment, Super Googan had sworn that Rutter had flown his last flit on air-mail.

So, deadheading west *via* mail planes, Rutter came to the Coast and moved in on the double-bed hospitality of my boarding house. A sort of temperamental reaction kept him from seeking work in other lines. Air-men are like that.

"Rutter—" my knee fitted nicely into the small of his back as I tumbled into bed—"Rutter, isn't it about time that you quit goldbricking and went to work?"

"Why," he mumbled as if understanding came hard, "you're working—And flying mighty regular— Good jack, too."

Then, after much grunting and groaning, he wormed his way deeper into the hay with something about two living as cheaply as one.

"Live, yes," I agreed, ignoring his old gag, and pulling an older one, "But how about eating?"

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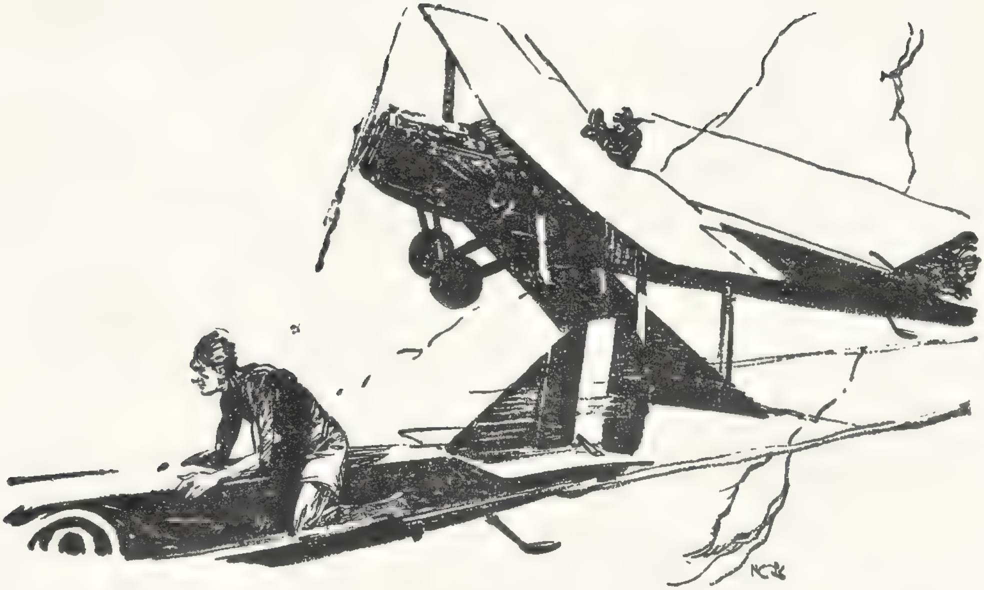

"The Lord will provide," he whispered slowly; "you know about the lilies and the majors of the field: they spin not neither do they loop, yet He takes care of them and all the other officials. So, have faith, Mac. I'll do something big in aviation yet. Perhaps I'll get a chance to wash the dirigible 'Los Angeles' or sweep its hangar. In the meantime, give me a smoke."

After lighting up, Rutter went away to a new start:

"Publicity is what I want too. This thing of losing magazine writers is sure-fire stuff but getting crowded. Now, when I get back to flying mail again—"

"Which is never—aviation's done with you," I cut in. "Googan has placed your name on the shell. Just so long as he's super, you'll do all your flying on the ground and in past tense. So back out bowing— The taxi companies are looking for dare-devils like you. Googan has clipt your wings for keeps."

"Bobbed my wings," Rutter mused; "that's not nice, Mac. And you know that it's bunk, also blah!" He put cold feet where cold feet feel the coldest and added, "Googan and I are cronies." He whole-hogged the covers and rolled; then sat up in bed.

My goggles hung on the bed-post. Rutter reached out and proceeded to convert the lenses into ash-trays. I put a stop to that. You can't do such a thing with a man's pet goggles; why, I've had those goggles all the way. Got 'em in France off a dead Boche's head. They've been lucky goggles. Goggles are like that: either all luck or no luck. It was a dumb thing to pull—use a bird's goggles like so much junk!

"Googan and I are like that." Rutter poked two closely associated fingers into my eye. "An old Hollywood ace is what the super is; he likes the cooing click of the camera— Even as you and I." From there on Rutter slept the sleep that never comes to those who work for a living.

When he's asleep, Rutter and I—and the rest of the world and Rutter—get along fine; but, in the open lists of promiscuous tongue-play, pitted against Rutter, such slow boys as the super and I have no chance. We'll be carried away on our shields every time, cold and seeing nothing. I like him asleep. He had done plenty of sleeping since the super gave him the regulation-sized can with tail-string adapter attached— But to think that that brainless bird would use my goggles for ash-trays!

THE few hours that Rutter didn't waste in my bed he squandered in Googan's office at the Bay City mail field. He was of the opinion that the super received much publicity that rightly belonged to the pilots. Rutter kidded Googan openly and without mercy. As to be expected, an air-mail official, meeting many news gatherers, is bound to get more or less personal attention. The super was getting his; it isn't on record that any of us avoided the stuff.

Talking to the reporters, Googan flew a great deal; Rutter claimed that the super had never been off the ground; there was no proof one way or another. It was Rutter's sorest spot and chief topic for endless wrangling.

"Googan, you should be on the stage." Rutter was paying one of his many-a-day visits to the super's office. The tone of his ready praise put Googan on guard. The latter threw aside a handful of his own press notices which he had been rereading, lighted a weed and fell to pacing the office floor. Now Googan was slow-witted, but there were fording places in his shallow imagination where, now and then, a light idea could get across. Such an idea—the idea that he was being kidded—was burning him up; he waited for what might follow Rutter's smooth opener. "Yes, Googan, you muffed your calling. You are the long-distance, back-patting champion of the world, the dean of contortionists. Your shoulder blades must be patted flat and sore; aren't they?"

Googan came to a warlike, lumbering stop where Rutter reposed atop a desk.

"Think I can't fly, Rutter?" he bellowed; "think I can't hop one of these crates?" The super glared and flared in Vesuvian blow-off. "Any dub can fly— I'll show you. Any dub can fly!"

"Googan, you're in a position to show what a dub can do. You're elected. It's what the reporters and cameramen want; I promised them that you'd fly; that's what they're waiting for. When will it be?"

"Rutter, you're taking too much of my valuable time. There's no place for you circus flyers in air-mail and from now on—if you insist upon inflicting your unwelcome presence on this field—you lay off these newspaper men; if there is anything to be given out, I'll be the one to give—"

"I'll answer it, Googan!" And Rutter beat the super to his own phone.

"The *Outlook* calling," he said and winked at the loungers. "It's Lane of the *Outlook*—wants to know when the super is going to make the public flight."

Then the super stalled, slightly. He pleaded urgent business at hand but promised Lane that he would get to it soon.

When Googan hung up, Rutter asked, cuttingly.

"When are you going to quit this four-flushing?"

The super, slouching into his chair, crouched low over his desk. The angry, red flesh billows of his pulled-in neck rolled high on the shoreline of his round haircut, and Rutter was under Googan's skin.

"You pilots," Googan raved, "hold a corner on the world's supply of egotism. The showmanship of aviation elevates yours above other callings; it makes you appear different; and gives you lame-brains a chance to strut your stuff in a field that looks heroic but is really drab. You jay-birds are riding the breaking crest of a shaky popularity: this dumb postwar worship of aviators. It has made he-flappers of you. Not one of you has the brains that God gave to little green apples. Luck and gall threw commissions into your laps—during the war—and that made pilots of you, otherwise you'd be just wing-walkers, plane-change men or so-called professional dare-devils with your brains in your hands, one dirty collar and no forwarding address. You're too conceited to stop and wonder how you got where you are; when you eventually do take a tumble and start falling not a Joe in the gang will know enough to raise an umbrella. Pilots!—Bushwah! Any dub can fly— I'll fly! It's like dancing—the dumber you are the better you are. Fly!

"And all I've said goes double for you, Rutter; you're the most conceited ass of the lot." Googan reached his high point and waited. He puffed and blew, watched attentively for results and added a tag, "You're an out-and-out pest—you monk!"

It was much lip-labor lost. Rutter, with faked awe, drawled—

"Lord! you do speak a nasty paragraph, Googan—bet you are a good dancer, too." He was laughing hard and on his way from the office.

"By the way, Googan—how about reinstating me?" Rutter, in the doorway, hesitated to ask.

"Reinstate you on air-mail!" Googan snapped. "Reinstate you! Did I get you right?"

"Roughly, Googan, roughly. That is

the plot. Yes, that's the idea: You take me off-the-ground and I'll furnish the continuity for your publicity show. Promise you lots of space and make you famous. In a way, Googan, you are in your own way; while you undeniably have the intestinal displacement of a daylight burglar, you lack finish; yours is the floundering finesse of a mired mastodon. You need me."

The smoke-belching Googan grew hotter. He made a try for words, and failing to find a high-powered come-back, gasped—

"Not while I'm incumbent—not while Colonel Googan is incumbent."

Rutter tried the super's word—"in-cumbent." He bore down heavily on each syllable. "In-cum-bent," he mused and studied his cigar-rolling ex-boss.

"Incumbent! You know, Googan, you are what, as a kid, I use to think that word meant. You're elected again; look it up in the unabridged."

Rutter's laughter and the noon-hour whistles, coming from without, buffeted Googan where he stood in mid-floor. Then the telephone called. Googan straightened his tie.

"Yes; this is Colonel Googan—the *Tribune?*—Ah! Well, now let's see—" And the sun was shining again, and Googan, being quite alone, spread the stuff thickly.

TO A GROUP standing in the hangar door, "Brick" Curtin was explaining the English method used in the training of that nation's night bombing flyers. The explanation, nicely told in the uncertain, vague argot of air, was over Googan's head when he happened along with a gang of his closest hand-shakers at heel. The super paused to stretch an ear and listen. Finally, turning to the most important member of his staff, he asked—

"Vale, just what is this English method?"

Vale, a cocky new pilot out of the East, was about to swell and tell the little he knew when Rutter, springing to his feet, saved the day. Rutter was always ready and anxious to explain things to officials who were being paid for what they were supposed to know.

"This, Googan," explained Rutter, "is known as the fusilage of an airplane." He thumped the long, slick veneered body of a near-by mail-plane. The super, mouthing his cigar, was getting his Irish up; he colored, bleached and colored again. "Now, the Limies in schooling their night pilots set off a closed, vision-proof fusilage compartment right here where we have the mail-pit—forward and between the wings. The student pilot, cooped in that compartment, had only his instruments: a compass, altimeter, spirit-levels, air-speed indicator, etc. As long as the guessing was good—he flew. In the floor, he had a small window—just a peep-hole—by which to land. The controls were dual. That is, the controls of the instructor sitting in the open cock-pit worked in unison with those of the hidden student, all-same tandem bike, Googan."

The super seemed lost to the world, and his face wore the expression of one who was gazing upon the promised land. Rutter brought him back:

"It was all very simple. Any pilot can fly in a closed cock-pit. Fact is, you are making night-bombers of all these boys—asking and compelling them to fly in this coast fog."

"How about it, Vale?" Googan spoke to his right-hand man. The super had ignored Rutter's reference to his bad judgment of flying weather.

"I was trained that way myself, sir," answered Vale, and they strolled away.

So, that very same day, what the super was henceforth to call his private plane was rolled to the secret quiet of the spare hangar. With Vale and the chief mechanic on the job, the plane was listed, on the labor sheet, as "in work."

The privacy of that hangar was held sacred; even Rutter, with the combined tact of Santa Claus and Houdini, failed to crash the gate. He argued that it was a public building and he a citizen; he demanded the well-known unalienable rights, but to no result. The work went on day after day.

Immediately after Googan's private plane went "in work" he seemed more anxious to fly and talked much along that line. No longer did he plead urgent business as a reason for avoiding flight. There was no putting-off now, no Fabian stalling; he was set.

"As soon as my plane—the Eagle—has been put in condition," he promised, "I'll give you reporters a treat. I'm having an extra-large gas tank placed where the mail-pit formerly was; I intend making many long and dangerous flights in locating and establishing new air-mail fields, and I—I—"

He made that promise publicly. It just about put Rutter out of business.

So, days passed and Rutter became impatient.

"You gay old deceiver," he taunted Googan, "you have no intention of flying."

There were several of us loafing in the flying office at the time. The boss went straight up, grew hot under the collar and ran wild. For a long minute, speechless, he glared at his tormentor. Rutter, knotted up on the edge of a desk, bared his teeth, monkey-scratched his ribs and grimaced like an ape.

"Rutter, you gorilla, I said that I'd fly," barked the super, "and my intention is genu-wine!"

"Genu-wine!" Rutter repeated. "Superintendent, do you use that 'wine' pronunciation through habit or accident?"

"Outside, Rutter!" Googan ordered. "—— you, Rutter—Outside!"

"Give me a look-in," Rutter begged, trying to appear sad. "I'm only a poor young feller without no edication as is tryin' to get along in the world."

"Look-in! From now out, you'll do nothing else but. You'll be on the outside looking in!" And Googan managed to force a laugh with his trite rejoiner. He made it stick; Rutter had talked his way into the great open spaces.

Now, as Rutter hinted, if the misplacing of that coast-to-coast plane was not prearranged by Googan, the very opportune mishap at least fell under the control of his usual luck. The chief mechanic and a wire from Reno entered Googan's office at the same time. The mechanic reported that the super's private plane was ready for flight. The wire was the one telling of the lost plane, pilot and magazine man.

And "what the public eats" was what Googan gave out for publication that afternoon. He stated that, in the event of failure on the part of a flying search sent out from Reno, he in person, at noon on the day to follow, would start out in his private plane—the Eagle—and continue the hunt until the lost men were found and returned to their brave families.

"That," said Rutter, "that is what I call man-talk—I'm all for old super Googan; bless his big, noble heart of hard, cold fools' gold. Even though he drove me out I'll be on hand tomorrow noon and direct the picture."

"But noon!" I exclaimed. "Why noon?" I could not figure why one should wait until noon before starting on such an important mission.

"Mac," Rutter petted, "come here. Now, drop that match, Mac, it's burning your fingers. That's a nice boy. Mac, I'll have to take care of you; you're too good for this world. You won't last. Look, Mac! Oh, your unsophistication is as a cooling breeze on the great desert of life. It is so guileless, so absolutely void of reasoning power—so big and fine and dumb! Step out of your character for a minute—stop chewing your thumb—and learn that the morning sun in this city of fog is more or less a wash-out for photographic purposes. Do you get it, Mac? The joyous cameras can not sing their sweet song till noon."

"Cut the monkey-business!" I sneered, getting pretty well riled. He cheep-cheeped, scratched and sailed from the bed to a dresser. Then dropped to a trunk and climbed the door jamb.

"Googan wasn't far wrong when he called you a monk," I remarked.

"Perhaps not at all wrong," Rutter mused, lapsing into his smiling mood and returning to bed. "Googan can't make me mad by calling me a monk. Guess, perhaps, I am. We all have our pet goofy dreams and nightmares. As a kid, my best and happiest ones found me swinging through trees with a pack of monks. Maybe not one of, but at least among them. I was always climbing.

"Even today, if I visit a zoo, that sympathetic urge—or something—seems to send me hopping and jumping with the monks; a nervous tension tells me that I want to climb with them, gape with them, and grimace, yes—and even scratch and hunt hard-shelled seam-squirrels in coarse, brown hair. Morbid? Not at all— There's a whole lot in this here evolution thing." He laughed and crossed the room, half-turned monkey-fashion and added:

"I might revert one of these days. If old Googan keeps my wings clipt, I'll sprout a tail."

"Well, you big plug-ugly!" I blew off. "Civilization's wasted on you; I'll tell the world, you are a monk!"

"If you do," he smiled, "you'll be violating a confidence."

AT NOON the following day the lost had not been found. The mail field, the cameras and Googan were preparing for Googan's departure on the promised epic search.

At twelve the rackety rumble and heraldic squeak of opening hangar doors ushered in the fanfaronade of four-flush and camera clicking. The gaudy cameramen—dressed as only the Californian male can or dare dress—cranked.

The swaying, eager crowd rolled back; made way for the super's oncoming plane.

Colonel Googan's coming out spoke of pageantry. From his high cock-pit—he was in the plane when the doors opened—like a fat, pompous ruler, he beamed on the multitude. Mechanics, lining the sides of the palanquin-like plane, crouched low and slaved slowly to the push. On and on toward the starting line majestically Googan rode. While Rutter, with his low-comedy lack of originality, strode before and scattered imaginary blooms. He, I now noticed, had caught the spirit of California. During several previous days, a movie company had been on location near the mail field. Fraternizing with the male star, Rutter, always quick to pick things up, was acquiring finish, and, evidently borrowing clothes.

Another of that movie outfit was taking more than a little of Rutter's time. Being a loafer, he had seen her first; there wasn't a man at the hangar who, given half a chance, wouldn't willingly have spent an evening at dominoes with Mlle. Voleur d'Airain, the leading lady.

She was a composite of what Flo looks for and what Wampus gets. When the Great Artisan, in preparation of pattern, struck the mold for that work in brass it was with something singular in view. When He broke away and destroyed that mold, something worth while stood against the old mud fence; and the work was good.

The movie outfit, and Voleur, was on hand to see the super get under way. Out of the crowd, Voleur came to laureate Googan with a large wreath of posies. Also, she was slated to say a few words.

Rutter, a few minutes before, had coached her. The sweet young thing now spoke of Colonel Googan, the father—the putative father—of air-mail; then she stopped and flushed when Rutter laughed. Others laughed too. It all left the super looking very foolish. He stood there, blankly, with his great, loose, horse-collar-like wreath hanging from his neck. He knew that something, out of order, had been said and he would have given much for an open season on Rutters.

A cameraman, changing plates in a "still," said—

"Just a minute, Mr. Googan—hold it."

It was something scandalous, the way old Googan posed for those cameras. But we followers of air like our cameras thick and large. Even the minute, hardly audible, inexpensive tick of a vest-pocket blur-catcher is music in our ears—of course not so symphonious as the clack-clack-clack of the honest-to-John, three-legged hand-winder, but we can't have the big ones all the time. You just bring any old camera—we'll stand.

An awed silence held the crowd as the cameraman changed plates.

The horse-collar-like wreath about the super's neck reminded one of the track: "Googan wins;" Rutter shouted. Then, as if talking in private and to himself, he could be heard musing—

"You certainly do look fine, Googan—" he studied the loose, flowery neckpiece—"but you'd look a whole lot better with a sweat-pad under that collar."

The super slumped and addressed the cameramen as he slid into his seat:

"I'll take-off and, at five thousand feet altitude, fly a few turns of the field before starting east on the hunt. You boys can get into the air and follow me; you can get some good pictures of the Eagle, and I, at that altitude, I—I—"

"The Eagle looks fine, Googan," said Rutter, forcing his way to the ship's side, "but don't forget what happened to old Humpty Dumpty, and he wasn't in a plane either! Tough pickings, Googan—so look out!"

The mechanics started the motor; Rutter, cutting in on me where I had been trying to soothe her temperamental anger, walked away with Voleur. I hear him explaining that he was only fooling when he miscoached and made a laughing-stock of her "few words." That's the way it goes: Those who abuse 'em always get them. It was a shame to see such a nice kid being wasted on a tramp like Rutter; and I'd have given a lot to get, by accident, any one of the smiles that she squandered on him. But what's the use— If you won't wear the gay rags you're out of luck on the coast.

The prologue had ended. I wondered what the next act in this buffoonery would bring. Googan, we all supposed, could not fly. He had never had a lesson, to our knowledge. His stand now, without doubt, was all bluff; but bluff had to end before the take-off. As we watched, he adjusted his goggles with a cool nicety, handled the controls with professional skill and familiarity, then waved the mechanics to pull the wheel-chocks— Now, surely, I'd wake up; dreams can't last forever!

So the air-wise—come to scoff—got set to pray.

The neighboring hills sent back the echoing roar in pulsatory throb as a whirligig of pursuing dust chased the departing plane west; then the ground-rumble of the ship's take-off ceased, and— The impossible had happened—Googan was in the air!

A weird, camera-bearing collection of air hacks was warming up preparatory for the pursuit of the Eagle and the desired pictures. It's a caution what cameramen will ride in!

In what was formerly an Army plane, with observer's cock-pit behind me, I was to carry Goodwin, cameraman for *Western News Weekly*. As the other planes got under way, Goodwin was having some trouble in making a camera set-up in my rear cock-pit. Rutter, quitting Voleur amid the blinding dust and wind of many planes, had anticipated Goodwin's trouble.

"I'll help you with that camera," he volunteered coming over the plane's side and joining Goodwin.

"Hello, dear!" Goodwin greeted Rutter. "You gorgeous loafer, you look like a million cold. I'll say that you are arrayed in 'the characteristic clothes of a gentleman' and, so help me!—for the first time in history, you're perfumed with an odor other than the stink of high-test gasoline." Goodwin turned to me. "Mac, how can you feel anything but pride in the fact that this gay romancer owes you money?"

The word-after-the-last in what a man, well dressed or otherwise, should not wear, unmindful of his gay plumage, fell-to and helped Goodwin.

"Rutter," Goodwin continued, as they worked, "Rutter, you sure do look fine, yes, you certainly do—"

"Never mind that," Rutter smiled back; "I'm all dolled up, got a bid for tea at three with my sweet Voleur. We ground birds have lots of time to strut and preen. While Mac, the old stiff, is going glare-blind looking into skies, hot-sport Rutter will be gazing into eyes—eyes where it lies and lies and lies!" Somehow or other that kidding about "his sweet Voleur" wasn't going very big with me; and I got plenty of air-work without ferrying Goodwin on my afternoon off— Guess I might take on some tea, too.

The field was in an uproar as plane after plane raced and roared into the west on its take-off. I gave Rutter no more thought, that is, no more thought than you would give some one who was going to spend the afternoon looking into eyes—well, eyes that glare-blinded you in another way. When Goodwin tapped my shoulder and yelled, "Let's go," I taxied down field, turned into the wind and got under way. The plane, once off the ground, seemed very tail-heavy, too much so. The old ark acted as if last-strawed to death. It stalled and staggered. I wondered why.

THE answer came at two thousand feet. Still busy with the business of my climb, and watching the sky ahead and the climbing planes to either side, above and below, I had not looked behind since leaving the starting line. A friendly, political slap on the back—it was heavy enough to produce that canvas-kissing, sharp, red-blurred sensation across the bridge of one's nose—drew my attention. I turned, wondering at Goodwin's crust; it wasn't Goodwin. During the commotion of the take-off, as a self-awarded token of appreciation for having helped Goodwin, Rutter ducking out of sight had remained aboard. Later, when I had flown my first turn and headed east, he once more slapped my teeth into the cowling by way of attracting me. He wanted to talk about something, or, more likely, about nothing.

Acting terror-stricken now, Rutter frantically signaled that I retard my motor's speed in order that he might be heard. We were over the heart of the city and beyond a safe glide to the only possible landing place—the waters of the bay. I went cold!

I drew back on my throttle until the

motor silenced and the plane—losing flying-speed and headway—mushed and flattened out in its glide.

Leaning over my shoulder and pushing my helmet back (and the great city was coming up fast) he whispered:

"Remember, sweetheart, old Tarzan takes tea at three with his sweet Voleur" (and by then I could see open mouths in the streets below), "so tromp on it"—he whaled me across the shoulders—"give 'er the gun and be careful. I'm wearing your other suit of new under-unmentionables."

Then the world went red, a vivid thing, a sanguine place of hate; and I longed to do one murder.

Dotting the East Bay sky, at about five thousand feet elevation, some of the other planes were shooting on Googan. We were coming in closer, too. But Goodwin had more trouble with his old black box; Rutter ordered that I hold off and wait.

Scudding west, one by one, the other planes had finished their shooting and quit the Eagle. High above the eastern hills the super's plane began to look small. As if Googan might be out to establish an altitude record. When Rutter gave me the word, the Eagle, as near as I could judge, had won all of ten thousand feet. At that minute it was making a sloppy turn into the west and coming back. As we came in for our pictures, it was only too evident that something was wrong aboard; the plane wasn't maneuvering in a business-like manner.

The oncoming plane seemed out of control, or, if not out of control, simply flying itself. A plane rightly rigged as to wing alignment and balance—and at a correct, exact motor speed—will fly alone; and, self-acting, through inherent stability, continue on and on, indefinitely. Indefinitely here is dependent upon and limited by the four-hour gas supply of the Eagle.

Such a plane—on its own—lacking the instantaneous corrective of the human hand and foot, will veer and bob to each change of wind and air-bump condition. This plane, Googan's, was doing it then, and doing it fine; thank God for the mechanic—and his good, steady, American eye—responsible for the Eagle's perfect wing balance alignment.

As the Eagle cut across our bow and sashayed west, we learned the reason for its drunken flight: Googan, slouched low in his seat, was in the untroubled Land of Nod. Asleep! Well, that did make flying easy, yes—these planes fly themselves!

Just beyond his wing-tip, with Goodwin cranking his camera, we followed the super's fantastic course. He raced across the bay, sliced the nothern end of town, picked up the north shore and headed down channel toward the Pacific where it hid in its bank of fog only a few miles away. I might have been staring yet and marveling at the wonders of freak flight had not Rutter brought me back to earth— It would have been a good time to wake up!

Rutter was tearing off his clothes, had everything removed but the lower half of three famous letters when I heard him yell and looked back.

"You'll have to crowd in— Put me on his tail," he was saying as he finished disrobing.

And I crowded in and liked the job not at all.

Piloting, as it figures in my life, serves only as a means to keep the wolf from the door—just a job. For stunt work, and that was what we were up against, I am too inert. I am unheroic, undeceived as to my lack of daring, mediocre and quite satisfied to admit it. The crowding proximity of another plane in flight, the death-dealing whirl of high-speed propellers and the gleaming, blinding sun-glare therefrom, the wind and many attending dangers, leave me dazed—my head aswim. None of that for me—Lord! I want a long white beard and a chance to tell a gang of small kids about the big war.

"Keep a stiff upper lip and the rest of the fittings," was all Rutter yelled as he climbed along the plane's fusilage and over my cock-pit, "and ride his tail— Put me on it." Then, before I could protest, Rutter, in passing, stole my goggles from my head— My good luck goggles! He crawled forward along the body of the plane to a position on the lower right wing.

Then, in his near-nudity, daring his way from wire to wire and from strut to strut, Rutter reached the far outer end of the wing and posed; hanging out—with a toe hooked around the flying-wires and hands free. He blew a kiss and waved me on. Half credulous, I found myself recalling and believing his monkey-talk, and I followed his heedless gaze below the wings and through two miles of space. I recoiled.

Ten thousand feet below, in another more-rational world, ships and ferries scratched their white-waked paths across the slaty bay; the great city of hills waved its lazy plumes of smoke and steam; and it all seemed so quiet and worth while down below that I found myself wishing that my brother were there and that I were safe at home.

Meanwhile, Rutter had finger-poked a handhold through the linen and around the frame-work of the wing's tip. Then, facing ahead, he held on by his left hand only; stood firmly on the corresponding foot, and, brakeman-style, signaled that I close the gap between planes. Now and then he thumbed his nose at Goodwin and me. A fine place and time for fun! Yes, perhaps, but I couldn't see it.

The planes, far out to sea now and ten thousand feet in the air, could not be seen from the mail field through the fog. What Rutter did then took but a few minutes. To me it seemed like hours of torture. I only expect to know one more suspense as long and doubtful: the one when the Angel Gabriel blows assembly and we come out to learn which detail we've made.

THEY'LL tell you that a thinking man can not change from one plane to another in flight; that a total separation of muscular action and intellectual responsibility is out of the question for a conscious thinker. But, for such work as this, either the subnormal or abnormal is necessary—which, we only have an idea, and that may be wrong. Moreover, lacking the driving egotism of the professional dare-devil, the normal man must fail. I believed that, too. I had never before seen a possessor of any imagination show the least desire for this wing-walking stuff.

The gap between ships shrank; and Rutter stretched his right leg, colossus-wise, across the Pacific and waited. A moment came when I thought the planes would brush. In that split second, his right foot touched Googan's tail surface— And an air-bump tossed us— And the dangling Rutter, hanging by one arm, stretched into space. But he was fighting, and, I think, chattering. He didn't look natural. Again the monkey-stuff came to mind. And the planes, tossing about, were far apart.

Time and again we milled together. One failure failed only by inches. On that try both of Rutter's feet had made the cross-over; he struggled to straighten up and fought to get his hand on a brace-wire stay, but—I fell down, failed to give him the last much-needed foot of flying help and nearly ended the show then and there.

Whenever his face turned my way, he seemed— Well, the less said about it the better. Perhaps it was imagination. Perhaps I, too, was chattering and bickering.

The next try was even worse. Coming into position, Googan's tail-plane rode just half-way between my upper and lower wings; it looked perfect and for a moment the air was smooth. The surfaces—my wings and the Eagle's tail—overlapped. Rutter made the grade that time and secured a handhold on the other ship; for a moment things could not have been better— Then there came a crashing jar and another pocket or bump had drifted the planes together. I fought to clear the planes and when I pulled away, Rutter had been forced back against and hung on the inter-strut brace wires of our own craft. Long, bleeding cross-welts—wire cuts—marked his back.

I was clammy then, fed up—fed up to the limit. We had made a good try—all and more than could be expected—and failed. It couldn't be done. The planes, I thought, had too much speed. The air was too bumpy. And, by now, Rutter was spent, too weak. The necessary stamina—required to work against that wind of more than a hundred miles per hour was not given to mortal man. It was a good time to quit.

But Rutter never looked my way once, never gave me a chance to call him back to the cock-pit. When I held away for seconds—after failures—he impatiently waved me back into action again. Ashamed, with him so gamely trying, I took the call.

We closed again and tried and failed and drifted; closed and failed some more, but, somewhere in the chaos, Rutter triumphed.

I remember seeing those long, red welts sprawled across the white, sun-shot surface of Googan's tail-plane, and knew, in a dopey way, that it was Rutter. He didn't sprawl there very long. Foot by foot, digging his fingers ape-like and sure, he made his way along the slick back of the fusilage of the Eagle to Googan's cock-pit. For a moment he hesitated there—reached inside and regulated the motor's speed to compensate for his future position forward—then crawled ahead to the front mail-pit compartment which had been cowled-in with hinged doors above what we supposed was the new gas-tank. The plane flew, as formerly, on a level keel; dead into the wind.

I paralleled its line-of-flight and watched; wondered at Rutter's last move and could not imagine why he had not crowded into the super's lap, taken the controls, and turned for home.

Reaching a stand on the left lower wing, Rutter unfastened the tie-down straps of the mail-pit's cover and threw it back on its hinges. Then, bending low into the compartment, he struggled as if with a weight, and, a few seconds later, drew forth into the propeller's cold wind blast the sagging head of Googan's favorite pilot—Vale. Slowly, Vale came to; he looked about, surprized—as well he might!

In a disinterested manner and pointing over his shoulder in the general direction of the super, Vale was explaining the happening to Rutter. The latter was laughing his fool head off.

Sufficiently revived, at the end of a few minutes, Vale reached for his controls and the ship was in hand. Kiddingly, Rutter undertook to close the compartment again above Vale's cock-pit and nearly succeeded. But Vale fought; he'd had enough of cooped-up flying to last a lifetime.

Googan, still low in his seat, slumbered. Rutter stretched back from his position on the wing and yanked the super's head over the side and into cool air; but gave him no more attention. Gargoyle-like, Googan looked long and far, yet saw nothing.

Behind us, standing here and there above the fog, the Coast Range mountains had reverted to the mole-hill. Small as they were, theirs was a great good influence toward some sane thinking; I had about decided upon a turn-around when my cold heart missed several shots and stopped dead: Rutter, during my coastwise gazing, had worked his way to the end of Vale's left wing and now waited to be taken off. He indicated his intent. This time he planned on a wing-to-wing change in place of the wing-to-tail stunt.

"Let him signal," I was thinking, "he'll grow old waiting for me to take him off that wing."

After giving him the laugh, I had started to swing around on my turn when he did it; so help me! The ill-bred ingrate! Wielding the only sacred, torturing whip at hand, he pulled my goggles from his head and stood posed and ready to hurl them into the Pacific—if I refused to come alongside. I'd brain the base brute had he done it! But what was I to do? I did.

Then Vale had a sort of buck-fever; he held away. But he'd have to come in, right in and butt wings—perhaps overlap a bit—were the mad man to get away with the proposed promenade. The mad man grew madder as Vale avoided the issue.

Across the short intervening space, Rutter's lips framed the word "wait." Redheaded then, he swung madly on his way back to Vale's side. That passage was with a speed and ease that seemed unhuman. He reached into the compartment, grabbed the control-stick, demanded left-rudder of Vale and brought the planes together. To make assurance doubly sure, he overlapped my right with Vale's left wing by a foot. Above the throttled drone of the two Liberty motors, his voice gave the order—

"Now hold it there, You ——!"

Rutter turned and came back to the end of the wing.

Then there was a tight minute when two planes moved as one, when two motors—synchronized to the last revolution—swapped beat for beat, purr for purr—And Rutter came across, hesitated for a moment to kick the planes apart, and the job was complete.

The moment that put Rutter in the clear found Vale high-tailing out of danger and headed shoreward. Both planes were roaring home when Rutter came in and reached my cock-pit.

"What's the idea of coming back to this plane?" I asked.

"Idea!"—he stopped above my shoulders—"You don't suppose that I'd be seen flying with Googan or Vale, do you? And I'm not going to fly mail planes at all until I'm officially caught and reinstated."

"What was wrong with them?" I asked by way of avoiding the playful abuse that was sure to come with Rutter's returning pep.

"Oh, Vale called for Googan to pump air pressure to the gas tank. The old bonehead pumped the liquid fire extinguisher and it doped them both. Just before he went out, Vale had head enough to set his throttle and slouch clear of his controls." He said no more; we flew on and the city came out of the fog. Soon the mail field lay below us.

"Make it fast," Rutter urged. "I'll be late for tea; I'm moving with big people now." With motor nearly dead, we were gliding in for a landing. As Rutter shouted, he was rapidly rehabiting his gaudy self in the loose raiment.

"You're at least borrowing clothes from big people," Goodwin shot after him, a few minutes later as Rutter quit the plane, scurried across the field and hailed a passing taxi. "Wonder what he'll use for money—nerve?"

Vale's plane grew small off in the east. The hunt was on—the hunt for some large field beyond the East Bay hills where they could land and continue the bluff; that would be easy. The great American public likes ye crude humbuggery, is carried away by the idea that Barnum must be upheld.

EARLY next morning somebody gave us a ring.

"Answer it," Rutter said. "It's your phone and I'm your guest."

It was Goodwin. He said that the reel was ready for a showing if I cared to see it. But I'd have to make it fast because the reel was to be shipped East at noon. He didn't think that Rutter should see it. I assured Goodwin that Rutter was not thin-skinned, but he insisted and I went down to Western's laboratory alone.

Standing near the machine, we watched the flight's reproduction. I had given Goodwin and his camera no attention after Rutter took my goggles and went out on the wing. But Goodwin, always on the job for Western, had cranked every foot of the way. He had it all. Now, on the screen, each last breath-robbing detail was brought back: the prologue to the flight, the start, the air pictures—and then came Rutter's stuff. Every try, every failure, everything I knew only too well and wished to forget came back—and more, more detail than the human eye can catch under fire. That detail, at times, proved that Rutter had, during the most horrific moments, resorted to the use of all fours—used them all as hands. The showing now brought it home with a bang.

Then came the actual boarding of Googan's plane. I had not appreciated that, fully, during the actual execution—I had been too finely drawn. Now I saw it all in its instantaneous sequence. He had failed and failed, fought and failed—then—for a single second—the other plane had dropped (Goodwin stopped the projecting machine here) just a few feet lower than my wing and slightly under. During that second, with hips high and legs spread, Rutter had pounced—animal-like and fighting—and dived through space; grabbing holds, upon landing, with all fours, he sprawled there. Victorious.

Then came that journey along the fusilage's narrow, slick back; he arrived at Googan's cock-pit; next, the business of reviving Vale; and then—I felt myself leaning toward the screen and feeling foolish—he stands posed and ready to hurl my goggles into the Pacific once more. Too bad that that camera didn't go out of business right there; the next was cruel. It showed the return from the wing tip to Vale's side when the latter refused to fly in close. Rutter was mad then. The reality of Goodwin's box never pulled a single punch, but flayed it right in cold. On that passage, according to the camera, Rutter had swung from wire to wire and from strut to strut, never hesitating, never touching a foot to the wing surface— But enough of this; perhaps a camera has imagination too.

"That goes out, Goodwin!"

"What?" Goodwin had finished his preview and pulled the roll from the lower magazine.

"That monkey-stuff— It's out!— You'll have to cut where it hits Rutter."

Goodwin fought a hard battle and won.

"It is kind of raw," he agreed, "but big—from my point of view." He turned to the cutting bench. "I'll cut it; the Googan stuff still makes a whale of a picture— It's what you air-mail birds want, too; eh?"

"O.K. with me!— Just cut the Rutter part."

Goodwin had cut and cut, and finished patching when Rutter stormed in:

"Why didn't you birds let me in on this showing—don't I fit at all?" he wanted to know.

"Boys, we've got the world by the belt!" Goodwin ranted as if nothing had happened. "You're made, Rutter. You're made, I was just going to show Mac—you're just in time."

"Just what do you mean, Goodwin,"

Rutter drawled; "where do I come in and when does Bull Montana move out?"

"I'll run it off," said Goodwin. "I'll show you."

The lights went out and the picture was on the screen once more.

"Yes, you're made, Rutter," Goodwin kept repeating. "Hollywood will pay you big for stunt stuff such as this." The reel still showed enough of Rutter's daring to thrill anybody. "It looks like velvet for you, a bungalow in Hollywood and a chance to wear strange clothes when and where you will; it'll sure beat going back to old Carthay Center where life detours and the folks are growing old."

Rutter did not seem elated with the prospects. Nor did his part in the drama seem to please him.

"Will you run that through again?" Rutter asked. "You can slow it up can't you— Run it slow."

Goodwin rewound his film. Two minutes later, very slowly this time, the thing was on the sheet again.

Rutter stood near the machine, waited and maintained a growing mood.

When the reel Rutter started out on the wing again, the real Rutter reached over and stopped the projecting machine. With a deft hand motion, he broke the film above the lower magazine and drew out the upper roll from its holder.

"—— it, man!" Goodwin exploded. "What—"

"Goodwin," Rutter spoke very low and slow and exceedingly hard, "that lower magazine still carries what you went out to get; this stuff, on the upper roll, is mine—It's censored."

Then he spoke of Googan:

"The old bird is gliding in for a landing—getting old; he's a pest and an imposition on a good game, but— Well, you and I—and Mac here—we're on the threshold with the whole show out front, so there's no kick in spilling this old stiff." He strode to a window; we followed.

Across the alley, behind Western's place, a new building was under construction. The white-dappled black boy, working a bin of slaked lime, looked around for somebody to cuss when the gooey mess splashed. We watched the film roll sink from sight, a black disc in the white smear, where Rutter had thrown it.

"It's big; it's one of the biggest things I've ever seen," Goodwin was saying. With an arm over Rutter's shoulders and a gripping pressure on his biceps, he watched his work disappear. He had lost; his sportsmanship had not. "What you did—I mean—It's one of the biggest things I ever hope to see. Spilling Googan meant so much to you and the game— With him out, you could get back on mail, too."

"No; it isn't big," Rutter argued. "If he only could fight back, if he could fight even a little, I'd look at it differently. There's no victory where there's no fight. He's not air-sized; I like to think that I can be."

Talbot Mundy

in

A Complete Novel

which he calls

An Episode Without a Hero

Tells Us of the Reign of
The Son of Marcus Aurelius

THE FALLING

IN THE REIGN OF THE EMPEROR COMMODUS.

GOLDEN ANTIOCH lay like a jewel at a mountain's throat. Wide, intersecting streets, each nearly four miles long, granite-paved, and marble-colonnaded, swarmed with fashionable loiterers. The gay Antiochenes, whom nothing except frequent earthquakes interrupted from pursuit of pleasure, were taking the air in chariots, in litters, and on foot; their linen clothes were as riotously picturesque as was the fruit displayed in open shop-fronts under the colonnades, or as the blossom on the trees in public gardens, which made of the city, as seen from the height of the citadel, a mosaic of green and white.

The crowd on the main thoroughfares was aristocratic; opulence was accented by groups of slaves in close attendance on their owners; but the aristocracy was sharply differentiated. The Romans, frequently less wealthy (because those who had made money went to Rome to spend it)—frequently less educated and, in general, not less dissolute—despised the Antiochenes, although the Romans loved Antioch. The cosmopolitan Antiochenes returned the compliment, regarding Romans as mere duffers in depravity, philistines in art, but capable in war and government, and consequently to be feared, if not respected. So there was not much mingling of the groups, whose slaves took example from their masters, affecting in public a scorn that they did not feel but were careful to assert. The Romans were intensely dignified and wore the toga, pallium and tunic; the Antiochenes affected to think dignity was stupid and its trappings (forbidden to them) hideous; so they carried the contrary pose to extremes.

Patterning herself on Alexandria, the city had become to all intents and purposes the eastern capital of Roman empire. North, south, east and west, the trade-routes intersected, entering the city through the ornate gates in crenelated limestone walls. From miles away the approaching caravans were overlooked by legionaries brought from Gaul and Britain, quartered in the capitol on Mount Silpius at the city's southern limit. The riches of the East, and of Egypt, flowed through, leaving their deposit as a river drops its silt; were ever-increasing. One quarter, walled off, hummed with foreign traders from as far away as India, who lodged at the travelers' inns or haunted the temples, the wine-shops and the lupanars. In that quarter, too, there were barracks, with compounds and

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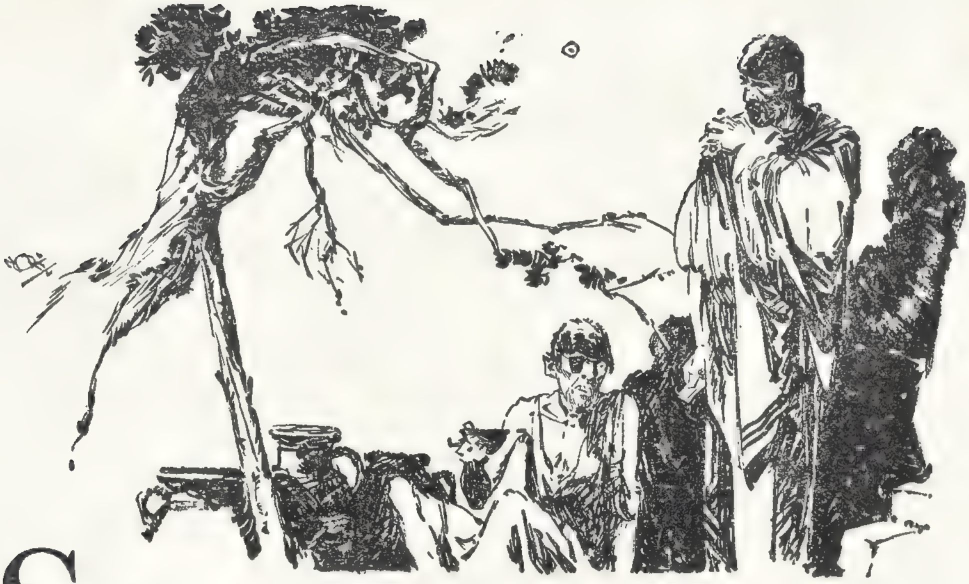


STAR

open-fronted booths, where slaves were exposed for sale; and there, also, were the caravanserais within whose walls the kneeling camels grumbled and the blossomy spring air grew fetid with the reek of dung. There was a market-place for elephants and other oriental beasts.

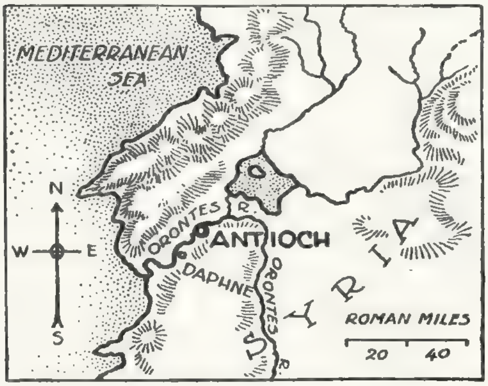
Each of Antioch's four divisions had its own wall, pierced by arched gates. Those were necessary. No more turbulent and fickle population lived in the known world—not even in Alexandria. Whenever an earthquake shook down blocks of buildings—and that happened nearly as frequently as the hysterical racial riots—the Romans rebuilt with a view to making communications easier from the citadel, where the great temple of Jupiter Capitolinus frowned over the gridironed streets.

Roman officials and the wealthier Macedonian Antiochenes lived on an island, formed by a curve of the River Orontes at the northern end within the city wall. The never-neglected problem of administration was to keep a clear route along which troops could move from citadel to island when the rioting began.

On the island was the palace, glittering with gilt and marble, gay with colored awnings, where kings had lived magnificently until Romans saved the city from them, substituting a proconsular paternal kind of tyranny originating in the Roman *patria potestas*. There was not much sentiment about it. Rome became the foster-parent, the possessor of authority. There was duty, principally exacted from the governed in the form of taxes and obedience; and there were privileges, mostly reserved for the rulers and their parasites, who were much more numerous than anybody liked. Competition made the parasites as discontented as their prey.

But there were definite advantages of Roman rule, which no Antiochene denied, although their comic actors and the slaves who sang at private entertainments mocked the Romans and invented accusations of injustice and extortion that were even more outrageous than the truth. Not since the days when Antioch inherited the luxury and vices of the Greeks and Syrians, had pleasure been so organized or its commercial pursuit so profitable. Taxes were collected rigorously. The demands of Rome, increased by the extravagance of Commodus, were merciless. But trade was good. Obedience and flattery were well rewarded. Citizens who yielded to extortion and refrained from criticism within hearing of informers lived in reasonable expectation of surviving the coming night.

But the informers were ubiquitous and unknown, which was another reason why the Romans and Antiochenes refrained from mixing socially more than could be helped. A secret charge of treason, based on nothing more than an informer's malice, might set even a Roman citizen outside the pale of ordinary law and make him liable to torture. If convicted, death and confiscation followed. Since the deification of the emperors it had become treason even to use a coarse expression near their images or statues; images were on the coins; statues were in the streets. Commodus, to whom all confiscated property accrued, was in ever-increasing need of funds to defray the titanic expense of the games that he lavished on Rome and the "presents" with which he studiously nursed the army's loyalty. So it was wise to be taciturn; expedient to choose one's friends deliberately; not far removed from madness to be seen in company with those whose antecedents might suggest the possibility of a political intrigue. But it was also unwise to woo solitude; a solitary man might perish by the rack and sword for lack of witnesses, if charged with some serious offense.



So there were comradeships more loyal the more that treachery stalked abroad. Because seriousness drew attention from the spies, the deepest thoughts were masked beneath an air of levity, and merrymaking hid such counsels as might come within the vaguely defined boundaries of treason.

SEXTUS, son of Maximus, rode not alone. Norbanus rode beside him, and behind them Scylax on the famous Arab mare that Sextus had won from Artaxes the Persian in a wager on the recent chariot races. Scylax was a slave but no less, for that reason, Sextus' friend.

Norbanus rode a skewbald Cappadocian that kicked out sidewise at pedestrians; so there was opportunity for private conversation, even on the road to Daphne of an afternoon in spring, when nearly all of fashionable Antioch was beginning to flow in that direction. Horses, litters and chariots, followed by crowds of slaves on foot with the provisions for moonlight banquets, poured toward the northern gate, some overtaking and passing the three but riding wide of the skewbald Cappadocian stallion's heels.

"If Pertinax should really come," said Sextus.

"He will have a girl with him," Norbanus interrrupted. He had an annoying way of finishing the sentences that other folk began.

"True. When he is not campaigning Pertinax finds a woman irresistible."

"And naturally, also, none resists a general in the field!" Norbanus added. "So our handsome Pertinax performs his vows to Aphrodite with a constancy that the goddess rewards by forever putting lovely women in his way! Whereas Stoics like you, Sextus, and unfortunates like me, who don't know how to amuse a woman, are made notorious by one least lapse from our austerity. The handsome, dissolute ones have all the luck. The roisterers at Daphne will invent such scandalous tales of us tonight as will pursue us for a lustrum, and yet there isn't a chance in a thousand that we shall even enjoy ourselves!"

"Yes. I wish now we had chosen any other meeting place than Daphne," Sextus answered gloomily.

"What odds? Had we gone into the desert Pertinax would have brought his own last desperate adorer, and a couple more to bore us while he makes himself ridiculous. Strange—that a man so firm in war and wise in government should lose his head the moment a woman smiles at him."

"He doesn't lose his head—much," Sextus answered. "But his father was a firewood seller in a village in Liguria. That is why he so loves money and the latest fashions. Poverty and rags—austerity inflicted on him in his youth—great Jupiter! If you and I had risen from the charcoal-burning to be consul twice and a grammarian and the friend of Marcus Aurelius; if you and I were as handsome as he is, and had experienced a triumph after restoring discipline in Britain and conducting two or three successful wars; and if either of us had such a wife as Flavia Titiana, I believe we would besmirch ourselves more constantly than Pertinax does! It is not that he delights in women so much as that he thinks debauch is aristocratic. Flavia Titiana is unfaithful to him. She is also a patrician and unusually clever. He has never understood her, but she is witty, so he thinks her wonderful and tries to imitate her immorality. But the only woman who really sways him is the proudish Cornificia, who is almost as incapable of treachery as Pertinax himself. He is the best governor the City of Rome has had in our generation. Can you imagine what Rome would be like without him? Call to mind what it was like when Fuscianus was the governor!"

"These are strange times, Sextus!"

"Aye! And it is a strange beast we have for emperor!"

"Be careful!"

Sextus glanced over his shoulder to make sure that Scylax followed closely and prevented any one from overhearing. There was an endless procession now, before and behind, all bound for Daphne. As the riders passed under the city gate, where the golden cherubim that Titus took from the Jews' temple in Jerusalem gleamed in the westering sun, Sextus noticed a slave of the municipium who wrote down the names of individuals who came and went.

"There are new proscriptions brewing," he remarked. "Some friends of ours will not see sunrise. Well—I am in a mood to talk and I will not be silenced."

"Better laugh then!" Norbanus advised. "The deadliest crime nowadays is to have the appearance of being serious. None suspects a drunken or a gay man."

Sextus, however, was at no pains to appear gay. He inherited the moribund traditions that the older Cato had typified some centuries ago. His young face had the sober, chiseled earnestness that had been typically Roman in the sterner days of the Republic. He had blue-gray eyes that challenged destiny, and curly brown hair, that suggested flames as the westering sun brought out its redness. Such mirth as haunted his rebellious lips was rather cynical than genial. There was no weakness visible. He had a pugnacious neck and shoulders.

"I am the son of my father Maximus," he said, "and of my grandsire Sextus, and of his father Maximus, and of my great-great-grandsire Sextus. It offends my dignity that men should call a hog like Commodus a god. I will not. I despise Rome for submission to him."

"Yet what else is there in the world except to be a Roman citizen?" Norbanus asked.

"As for being, there is nothing else," said Sextus. "I would like to speak of doing. It is what I do that answers what I am."

"Then let it answer now!" Norbanus laughed. He pointed to a little shrine beside the road, beneath a group of trees, where once the image of a local deity had smiled its blessing on the passer-by. The bust of Commodus, as insolent as the brass of which the artist-slaves had cast it, had replaced the old benign divinity. There was an attendant near by, costumed as a priest, whose duty was to see that travelers by that road did their homage to the image of the human god who ruled the Roman world. He struck a gong. He gave fair warning of the deference required. There was a little guard-house, fifty paces distant, just around the corner of the clump of trees, where the police were ready to execute summary justice, and floggings were inflicted on offenders who could not claim citizenship or who had no coin with which to buy the alternative reprimand. Roman citizens were placed under arrest, to be submitted to all manner of indignities and to think themselves fortunate if they should escape with a heavy fine from a judge who had bought his office from an emperor's favorite.

Most of the riders ahead dismounted and walked past the image, saluting it with right hands raised. Many of them tossed coins to the priest's attendant slave. Sextus remained in the saddle, his brow clouded with an angry scowl. He drew rein, making no obeisance, but sent Scylax to present an offering of money to the priest, then rode on.

"Your dignity appears to me expensive!" Norbanus remarked, grinning. "Gold?"

"He may have my gold, if I may keep my self-respect!"

"Incorrigible stoic! He will take that also before long!"

"I think not. Commodus has lost his own and destroyed Rome's, but mine not yet. I wish, though, that my father were in Antioch. He, too, is no cringer to images of beasts in purple. I wrote to my father recently and warned him to leave Rome before Commodus's spies could invent an excuse for confiscating our estates. I said, an absent man attracts less notice, and our estates are well worth plundering. I also hinted that Commodus can hardly live forever, and reminded him that tides flow in and out—by which I meant him to understand that the next emperor may be another such as Aurelius, who will persecute the Christians but let honest men live in peace, instead of favoring the Christians and ridding Rome of honest men."

Norbanus made a gesture with his right hand that sent the Cappadocian cavorting to the road's edge, scattering a little crowd that was trying to pass.

"Why be jealous of the Christians?" he laughed. "Isn't it their turn for a respite? Think of what Nero did to them; and Marcus Aurelius did little less. They will catch it again when Commodus turns on his mistress Marcia; he will harry them all the more when that day comes—as it is sure to. Marcia is a Christian; when he tires of her he will use her Christianity for the excuse and throw the Christians to the lions by the thousand in order to justify himself for murdering the only decent woman of his acquaintance. *Sic semper tyrannus.* Say what you will about Marcia, she has done her best to keep Commodus from making a public exhibition of himself."

"With what result? He boasts he has killed no less than twelve hundred poor devils with his own hand in the arena. True, he takes the pseudonym of Paulus when he kills lions with his javelin and drives a chariot in the races like a vulgar slave. But everybody knows, and he picks slaves for his ministers—consider that vile beast Cleander, whom even the rabble refused to endure another day. I don't see that Marcia's influence amounts to much."

"But Cleander was executed finally. You are in a glum mood, Sextus. What has happened to upset you?"

"It is the nothing that has happened. There has come no answer to that letter I wrote to my father in Rome. Commodus's informers may have intercepted it."

Norbanus whistled softly. The skewbald Cappadocian mistook that for a signal to exert himself and for a minute there were ructions while his master reined him in.

"When did you write?" he demanded, when he had the horse under control again.

"A month ago."

Norbanus lapsed into a moody silence, critically staring at his friend when he was sure the other was not looking. Sextus had always puzzled him by running risks that other men (himself, for instance) steadfastly avoided, and avoiding risks that other men thought insignificant. To write a letter critical of Commodus was almost tantamount to suicide, since every Roman port and every rest-house on the roads that led to Rome had become infested with informers who were paid on a percentage basis.

"Are you weary of life?" he asked after a while.

"I am weary of Commodus—weary of tyranny—weary of lies and hypocrisy—weary of wondering what is to happen to Rome that submits to such bestial government—weary of shame and of the insolence of bribe-fat magistrates—"

"Weary of your friends?" Norbanus asked. "Don't you realize that if your letter fell into the hands of spies, not only will you be proscribed and your father executed, but whoever is known to have been intimate with you or with your father will be in almost equal danger? You should have gone to Rome in person to consult your father."

"He ordered me to stay here to protect his interests. We are rich, Norbanus. We have much property in Antioch and many tenants to oversee. I am not one of these modern irreligious wastrels; I obey my father—"

"And betray him in an idiotic letter!"

"Very well! Desert me while there is time!" said Sextus angrily.

"Don't be a fool! You are not the only proud man in the empire, Sextus. I don't desert my friend for such a coward's reason as that he acted thoughtlessly. But I will tell you what I think, whether or not that pleases you, if only because I am your true friend. You are a rash, impatient lover of the days gone by, possessed of genius that you betray by your arrogant hastiness. So now you know what I think, and what all your other friends think. We admire—we love our Sextus, son of Maximus. And we confess to ourselves that our lives are in danger because of that same Sextus, son of Maximus, whom we prefer above our safety. After this, if you continue to deceive yourself, none can blame me for it!"

Sextus smiled and waved a hand to him. It was no new revelation. He understood the attitude of all his friends far better than he did his own strange impulses that took possession of him as a rule when circumstances least provided an excuse.

"My theory of loyalty to friendship," he remarked, "is that a man should dare to do what he perceives is right, and thus should prove himself entitled to respect."

"And your friends are, in consequence, to enjoy the privilege of attending your crucifixion one of these days!" said Norbanus.

"Nonsense. Only slaves and highwaymen are crucified."

"They call any one a highwayman who is a fugitive from what our 'Roman Hercules' calls justice," Norbanus answered with a gesture of irritation. His own trick of finishing people's sentences did not annoy Sextus nearly as much as Sextus's trick of pouncing on inaccuracies irritated him. He pressed his horse into a canter and for a while they rode beside the stream called the "Donkeydrowner" without further conversation, each man striving to subdue the ill-temper that was on the verge of outbreak.

ROMANS of the old school valued inner calm as highly as they did the outer semblances of dignity; even the more modern Romans imitated that distinctive attitude, pretending to Augustan calmness that had actually ceased to be a part of public life. But with Sextus and Norbanus the inner struggle to be self-controlled was genuine; they bridled irritation in the same way that they forced their horses to obey them—captains of their own souls, as it were, and scornful of changefulness.

Sextus, being the only son of a great landowner, and raised in the traditions of a secluded valley fifty leagues away from Rome, was almost half a priest by privilege of ancestry. He had been educated in the local priestly college, had himself performed the daily sacrifices that tradition imposed on the heads of families and, in his father's frequent absence, had attended to all the details and responsibilities of managing a large estate. The gods of wood and stream and dale were very real to him. The daily offering, from each meal, to the *manes* of his ancestors, whose images in wax and wood and marble were preserved in the little chapel attached to the old brick homestead, had inspired in him a feeling that the past was forever present and a man's thoughts were as important as his deeds.

Norbanus, on the other hand, a younger son of a man less amply dowered with wealth and traditional authority, had other reasons for adopting, rather than inheriting, an attitude toward life not dissimilar from that of Sextus. Gods of wood and stream to him meant very little, and he had no family estates to hold him to the ancient views. To him the future was more real than the past, which he regarded as a state of ignorance from which the world was tediously struggling. But inherently he loved life's decencies, although he mocked their sentimental imitations; and he followed Sextus—squandered hours with him, neglecting his own interests (which after all were nothing too important and were well enough looked after by a Syracusan slave), simply because Sextus was a manly sort of fellow whose friendship stirred in him emotions that he felt were satisfying. He was a born follower. His ugly face and rather mirth-provoking blue eyes, the loose, beautifully balanced seat on horseback and the cavalry-like carriage of his shoulders, served their notice to the world at large that he would stick to friends of his own choosing and for purely personal reasons, in spite of, and in the teeth of anything.

"As I said," remarked Sextus, "if Pertinax comes—"

"He will show us how foolish a soldier can be in the arms of a woman," Norbanus remarked, laughing again, glad the long silence was broken.

"Orcus* take his women! What I was going to say was, we shall learn from him the real news from Rome."

"All the names of the popular dancers!"

"And if Galen is there we shall learn—"

"About Commodus' health. That is more to the point. Now if we could get into Galen's chest of medicines and substitute—"

"Galen is an honest doctor," Sextus interrupted. "If Galen is there we will find out what the philosophers are discussing in Rome when spies aren't listening. Pertinax dresses himself like a strutting peacock and pretends that women and money are his only interests, but what the wise ones said yesterday, Pertinax does today; and what they say today, he will do tomorrow. He can look more like a popinjay and act more like a man than any one in Rome."

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*Orcus—the messenger of Dis, who carried dead souls to the underworld. The masked slaves who dragged dead gladiators out of the arena were disguised to represent Orcus.

"Who cares how they behave in Rome? The city has gone mad," Norbanus answered. "Nowadays the best a man can do is to preserve his own goods and his own health. Ride to a conference, do we? Well, nothing but words will come of it, and words are dangerous. I like my danger tangible and in the open where it can be faced. Three times last week I was approached by Glyco—you remember him?—that son of Cocles and the Jewess—asking me to join a secret mystery of which he claims to be the unextinguishable lamp. But there are too many mysteries and not enough plain dealing. The only mystery about Glyco is how he avoids indictment for conspiracy—what with his long nose and sly eyes, and his way of hinting that he knows enough to turn the world upside down. If Pertinax talks mystery I will class him with the other foxes who slink into holes when the *agenda* look like becoming *acta*. Show me only a raised standard in an open field and I will take my chance beside it. But I sicken of all this talk of what we might do if only somebody had the courage to stick a dagger into Commodus."

"The men who could persuade themselves to do that, are persuaded that a worse brute might succeed him," Sextus answered. "It is no use killing a Commodus to find a Nero in his shoes. If the successor were in sight—and visibly a man not a monster—there are plenty of men brave enough to give the dagger-thrust. But the prætorian guard, that makes and unmakes emperors, has been tasting the sweets of tyranny ever since Marcus Aurelius died. They despise their 'Roman Hercules'*—who doesn't? But they grow fat and enjoy themselves under his tyranny, so they would never consent to leaving him unguarded, as happened to Nero, for instance, or to replacing him with any one of the caliber of Aurelius, if such a man could be found."

"Well, then, what do we go to talk about?" Norbanus asked.

"We go for information."

"Dea dia! * We inform ourselves that Rome has been renamed "The City of Commodus"—that offices are bought and sold—that there were forty consuls in a year, each of whom paid for the office in turn—that no man's life is safe—that it is wiser to take a cold in the head to Galen than to kiss a mule's nose†—and then what? I begin to think that Pertinax is wiser to amuse himself with women after all!"

Sextus edged his horse a little closer to the skewbald and for more than a minute appeared to be studying Norbanus' face, the other grinning at him and making the stallion prance.

"Are you never serious?" asked Sextus.

"Always and forever, melancholy friend of mine! I seriously dread the consequences of that letter that you wrote to Rome! Unlike you, I have not much more than life to lose, but I value it all the more for being less encumbered. Like Apollonius, I pray for few possessions and no needs! But what I have, I treasure; I propose to live long and make use of life!"

"And I!" retorted Sextus.

With a gesture of disgust he turned to stare behind him at the crowd on its way to Daphne, making such a business of pleasure as reduced the pleasure to a toil of Sisyphus.‡

"I have more than gold," said Sextus, "which it seems to me that any crooked-minded fool may have. I have a spirit in me, and a taste for the philosophies; I have a feeling that a man's life is a gift entrusted to him by the gods—for use—to be preserved—"

"By writing foolish letters, doubtless!" said Norbanus. "Come along, let us gallop. I am weary of the backs of all these roisterers."

And so they rode to Daphne full pelt, greatly to the anger of the too well dressed Antiochenes, who cursed them for the mud they splashed from wayside pools and for the dung and dust they kicked up into plucked and penciled faces.

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*Commodus' favorite name for himself.

*The most mysterious of all the Roman deities.

†It was a common superstition that a cold in the head could be cured by kissing a mule's nose.

‡Who had to roll a heavy stone perpetually up a steep hill in the underworld. Before he reached the top the stone always rolled down again.

CHAPTER II

A CONFERENCE AT DAPHNE.

IT WAS not yet dusk. The sun shone no the bronze roof of the temple of Apollo, making such a contrast to, and harmony with, marble and the green of giant cypresses as only music can suggest. The dying breeze stirred hardly a ripple on the winding ponds, so marble columns, trees and statuary were reflected amid shadows of the swans in water tinted by the colors of the sinking sun. There was a murmur of wind in the tops of the trees and a stirring of linen-clad girls near the temple entrance—voices droning from the near-by booths behind the shrubbery—one flute, like the plaint of Orpheus summoning Eurydice—a blossom-scented air and an enfolding mystery of silence.

Pertinax, the governor of Rome, had merely hinted at Olympian desire, whereat some rich Antiochenes, long privileged, had been ejected with scant ceremony from a small marble pavilion on an islet, formed by a branch of the River Ladon that had been guided twenty years ago by Hadrian's engineers in curves of exquisitely studied beauty. From between Corinthian columns was a view of nearly all the temple precincts and of the lawns where revelers would presently forget restraint. The first night of the Daphne season usually was the wildest night of all the year, but they began demurely, and for the present there was the restraint of expectation.

Because there was yet snow on mountain-tops and the balmy air would carry a suggestion of a chill at sunset, there were cunningly wrought charcoal braziers set near the gilded couches, grouped around a semicircular low table so as to give each guest an unobstructed view from the pavilion. Pertinax—neither guest nor host, but a god, as it were, who had arrived and permitted the city of Antioch to ennoble itself by paying his expenses—stretched his long length on the middle couch, with Galen the physician on his right hand, Sextus on his left. Beyond Galen lay Tarquinius Divius and Sulpicius Glabrio, friends of Pertinax; and on Sextus' left was Norbanus, and beyond him Marcus Fabius a young tribune on Pertinax' staff. There was only one couch unoccupied.

Galen was an older man than Pertinax, who was already graying at the temples. Galen had the wrinkled, smiling, shrewd face of an old philosopher who understood the trick of making himself socially prominent in order to pursue his calling unimpeded by the bitter jealousies of rivals. He understood all about charlatanry, mocked it in all its disguises and knew how to defeat it with sarcastic wit. He wore none of the distinguishing insignia that practising physicians usually favored; the studied plainness of his attire was a notable contrast to the costly magnificence of Pertinax, whose double-purple-bordered and fringed toga, beautifully woven linen and jeweled ornaments seemed chosen to combine suggestions of the many public offices he had succeeded to.

He was a tall, lean, handsome veteran with naturally curly fair hair and a beard that, had it been dark, would have made him look like an Assyrian. There was a world of humor in his eyes, and an expression on his weathered face of wonder at the ways of men—an almost comical confession of his own inferiority of birth, combined with matter-of-fact ability to do whatever called for strength, endurance and mere ordinary common sense.

"You are almost ashamed of your own good fortune," Galen told him. "You wear all that jewelry, and swagger like the youngest tribune, to conceal your diffidence. Being honest, you are naturally frugal; but you are ashamed of your own honesty, so you imitate the court's extravagance and make up for it with little meannesses that comfort your sense of extremes. The truth is, Pertinax, you are a man with a boy's enthusiasms, a boy with a man's experience."

"You ought to know," said Pertinax. "You tutored Commodus. Whoever could take a murderer at the age of twelve and keep him from breaking the heart of a Marcus Aurelius knows more about men and boys than I do."

"Ah, but I failed," said Galen. "The young Commodus was like a nibbling fish; you thought you had him, but he always took the bait and left the hook. The wisdom I fed to him fattened his wickedness. If I had known then what I have learned from teaching Commodus and others, not even Marcus Aurelius could have persuaded me to undertake the task—medical problem though it was, and promotion though it was, and answer though it was to all the doctors who denounced me as a charlatan. I bought my fashionable practise at the cost of knowing it was I who taught young Commodus the technique of wickedness by revealing to him all its sinuosities and how, and why, it floods a man's mind."

"He was a beast in any case," said Pertinax.

"Yes, but a baffled, blind beast. I removed the bandage from his eyes."

"He would have pulled it off himself."

"I did it. I turned a mere golden-haired savage into a criminal who knows what he is doing."

"Well, drink and forget it!" said Pertinax. "I, too, have done things that are best forgotten. We attain success by learning from defeat, and we forget defeat in triumph. I know of no triumph that did not blot out scores of worse things than defeat. When I was in Britain I subdued rebellion and restored the discipline of mutinying legions. How? I am not such a fool as to tell you all that happened! When I was in Africa men called me a great proconsul. So I was. They would welcome me back there, if all I hear about the present man is true. But do you suppose I did not fail in certain instances? They praise me for the aqueducts I built, and for the peace I left along the border. But I also left dry bones, and sons of dead men who will teach their grandsons how to hate the name of Rome! I sent a hundred thousand slaves from Africa. Sometimes, when I have dined unwisely, and there is no Galen near to freshen up my belly-juices, I have nightmares, in which men and women cry to me for water that I took from them to pour into the cities. I have learned this, Galen: Do one thing wisely and you will commit ten follies. You are lucky if you have but ten failures to detract from one success—as lucky as a man who has but ten mistresses to interfere with his enjoyment of his wife!"

He spoke of mistresses because the girls were coming down the temple steps to take part in the sunset ceremony. The torches they carried were unlighted yet; their figures, draped in linen, looked almost superhumanly lovely in the deepening twilight, and as they laid their garlands on the marble altar near the temple steps and grouped themselves again on either side of it their movements suggested a phantasmagoria fading away into infinite distance, as if all the universe were filled with women without age or blemish. There began to be a scent of incense in the air.

"We only imitate this kind of thing in Rome," said Pertinax. "A larger scale, a coarser effect. What I find thrilling is the sensation they contrive here of unseen mysteries. Whereas—"

"There won't be any mystery left presently! They'll strip your last veil from imagination!" Sextus interrupted, laughing. "Men say Hadrian tried to chasten this place, but he only made them realize the artistic value of an appearance of chastity, that can be thrown off. Hark! The evening hymn."

The torches suddenly were lighted by attendant slaves. The stirring, shaken sistra wrought a miracle of sound that set the nerves all tingling as the high priest, followed by his boys with swinging censers and the members of the priestly college, four by four, came chanting down the temple steps. To an accompanying pleading, sobbing note of flutes the high priest laid an offering of fruit, milk, wine and honey in the midst of the heaped-up garlands (for Apollo was the god of all fertility as well as of healing and war and flocks and oracles). Then came the grand Homeric hymn to Glorious Apollo, men's and boys' and women's voices blending in a surging pæan like an ocean's music.

The last notes died away in distant echoes. There was silence for a hundred breaths; then music of flute and lyre and sistra as the priests retreated up the temple steps followed by fanfare on a dozen trumpets as the door swung to behind the priests. Instantly, then, shouts of laughter—torchlight scattering the shadows amid gloom-green cypresses—fire-color splurging on the bosom of the water—babel of hundreds of voices as the gay Antiochenes swarmed out from behind the trees—and a cheer, as the girls by the altar threw their garments off and scampered naked along the river-bank toward a bridge that joined the temple island to the sloping lawns, where the crowd ran to await them.

"Apollo having healed the world of sin, we now do what we like!" said Sextus. "Pertinax, I pledge you continence for this one night! Good Galen, may Apollo's wisdom ooze from you like sweat; for all our sakes, be you the arbiter of what we drink, lest drunkenness deprive us of our reason! *Comites*, let us eat like warriors—

one course, and then discussion of tomorrow's plan."

"Your military service should have taught you more respect for your seniors, as well as how to eat and drink temperately," said Pertinax. "Will you teach your grandmother to suck eggs? I was the first grammarian in Rome before you were born and a tribune before you felt down on your cheek. I am the governor of Rome, my boy. Who are you, that you should lecture me?"

"If you call that a lecture, concede that I dared," Sextus answered. "I did not flatter you by coming here, or come to flatter you. I came because my father tells me you are a Roman beyond praise. I am a Roman. I believe praise is worthless unless proven to the hilt—as for instance: I have come to bare my thoughts to you, which is a bold compliment in these days of treachery."

"Keep your thoughts under cover," said Pertinax, glancing at the steward and the slaves who were beginning to carry in the meal. But he was evidently pleased, and Sextus's next words pleased him more:

"I am ready to do more than think about you. I will follow where you lead—except into licentiousness!"

He lay on both elbows and stared at the scene with disgust. Naked girls, against a background of the torchlit water and the green and purple gloom of cypresses, was nothing to complain of; statuary, since it could not move, was not as pleasing to the eye; but shrieks of idiotic laughter and debauchery of beauty sickened him.

There came a series of sounds at the pavilion entrance, where a litter was set down on marble pavement and a eunuch's shrill voice criticized the slow unrolling of a carpet.

"What did I warn you?" Norbanus whispered, laughing in Sextus's ear.

Pertinax got to his feet, long-leggedly statuesque, and strode toward the antechamber on his right, whence presently he returned with a woman on his arm, he stroking her hand as it rested on his. He introduced Sextus and Norbanus; the others knew her; Galen greeted her with a wrinkled grin that seemed to imply confidence.

"Now that Cornificia has come, not even Sextus need worry about our behavior!" said Galen, and everybody except Sextus grinned. It was notorious that Cornificia refined and restrained Pertinax, whereas his lawful wife Flavia Titiana merely drove him to extremes.

This Roman Aspasia had an almost Grecian face, beneath a coiled extravagance of dark brown hair. Her violet eyes were quietly intelligent; her dress plain white and not elaborately fringed, with hardly any jewelry. She cultivated modesty and all the older graces that had grown unfashionable since the Emperor Marcus Aurelius died. In all ways, in fact, she was the opposite of Flavia Titiana—it was hard to tell whether from natural preference or because the contrast to his wife's extremes of noisy gaiety and shameless license gave her a stronger hold on Pertinax. Rome's readiest slanderers had nothing scandalous to tell of Cornificia, whereas Flavia Titiana's inconstancies were a by-word.

She refused to let Galen yield the couch on Pertinax's right hand but took the vacant one at the end of the half-moon table, saying she preferred it—which was likely true enough; it gave her a view of all the faces without turning her head or appearing to stare.

For a long time there was merely desultory conversation while the feast, restricted within moderate proportions by request of Pertinax, was brought on.

There were eels, for which Daphne was famous; alphests and callichthys; pompilos, a purple fish, said to have been born from sea-foam at the birth of Aphrodite; boops and bedradones; gray mullet; cuttle-fish; tunny-fish and mussels. Followed in their order pheasants, grouse, swan, peacock and a large pig stuffed with larks and mincemeat. Then there were sweetmeats of various kinds, and a pudding invented in Persia, made with honey and dates, with a sauce of frozen cream and strawberries. By Galen's order only seven sorts of wine were served, so when the meal was done the guests were neither drunk nor too well fed to carry on a conference.

No entertainers were provided. Normally the space between the table and the front of the pavilion would have been occupied by acrobats, dancers and jugglers; but Pertinax dismissed even the impudent women who came to lean elbows on the marble railing and sing snatches of suggestive song. He sent slaves to stand outside and keep the crowd away, his lictor and his personal official bodyguard being kept out of sight in a small stone house near the pavilion kitchen at the rear among the trees, in order not to arouse unwelcome comment. It was known he was in Daphne; there was even a subdued expectation in Antioch that his unannounced visit portended the extortion of extra tribute. The Emperor Commodus was known to be in his usual straits for money. Given a sufficient flow of wine, the sight of bodyguard and lictor might have been enough to start a riot, the Antiochenes being prone to outbreak when their passions were aroused by drink and women.

There was a long silence after Pertinax had dismissed the steward. Galen's old personal attendant took charge of the amphora of snow-cooled Falernian; he poured for each in turn and then retired into a corner to be out of earshot, or at any rate to emphasize that what he might hear would not concern him. Pertinax strolled to the front of the pavilion and looked out to make sure there were no eavesdroppers, staring for a long time at the revelry that was warming up into an orgy. They were dancing in rings under the moon, their shadowy figures rendered weird by smoky torchlight. Cornificia at last broke on his reverie:

"You wish to join them, Pertinax? That would dignify even our Roman Hercules—to say nothing of you!"

He shrugged his shoulders, but his eyes were glittering.

"If Marcia could govern Commodus as you rule me, he would be safer on the throne!" he answered, coming to sit upright on the couch beside her. It was evident that he intended that speech to release all tongues; he looked from face to face expectantly, but no one spoke until Cornificia urged him to protect himself against the night breeze. He threw a purple-bordered cloak over his shoulders. It became him; he looked so official in it, and majestic, that even Sextus—rebel that he was against all modern trumpery—forbore to break the silence. It was Galen who spoke next:

"Pertinax, if you might choose an emperor, whom would you nominate? Remember: He must be a soldier, used to the stench of marching legions. None could govern Rome whose nose goes up in the air at the smell of sweat and garlic."

There was a murmur of approval. Cornificia stroked the long, strong fingers of the man she idolized. Sextus gave rein to his impulse then, brushing aside Norbanus' hand that warned him to bide his time:

"Many more than I," he said, "are ready to throw in our lot with you, Pertinax—aye, unto death! You would restore Rome's honor. I believe my father could persuade a hundred noblemen to take your part, if you would lead. I can answer for five or six men of wealth and influence, not reckoning a friend or two who—"

"Why talk foolishness!" said Pertinax. "The legions will elect Commodus' successor. They will sell Rome to the highest bidder, probably; and though they like me as a soldier they dislike my discipline. I am the governor of Rome and still alive in spite of it because even Commodus' informers know it would be silly to accuse me of intrigue. Not even Commodus would listen to such talk. I lead the gay life, for my own life's sake. All know me as a roisterer. I am said to have no ambition other than to live life sensuously."

Galen laughed.

"That may deceive Commodus," he said. "The thoughtful Romans know you as a frugal governor, who stamped out plague and—"

"You did that," said Pertinax.

"Who enabled me?"

"It was a simple thing to have the tenements burned. Besides, it profited the city—new streets; and there was twice the amount of tax on the new tenements they raised. I, personally, made a handsome profit on the purchase of a few burned houses."

"And as the governor who broke the famine," Galen continued.

"That was simple enough, but you may as well thank Cornificia. She found out through the women who the men were who were holding corn for speculation. All I did was to hand their names to Commodus; he confiscated all the corn and sold it—at a handsome profit to himself, since it had cost him nothing!"

"While we sit here and cackle like Asian birds, Commodus renames Rome the City of Commodus and still lives!" Sextus grumbled.

"Nor can he be easily got rid of," remarked Dædalus the tribune. "He goes to and fro from the palace through underground tunnels. Men sleep in his room who are all involved with him in cruelties and infamy, so they guard him carefully. Besides, whoever tried to murder him would probably kill Paulus by mistake! The prætorian guard is contented, being well paid and permitted all sorts of privileges. Who can get past the prætorian guard?"

"Any one!" said Pertinax. "The point is not, who shall kill Commodus? But who shall be raised in his place? There are thirty thousand ways to kill a man. Ask Galen!"

Old Galen laughed at that.

"As many ways as there are stars in heaven; but the stars have their say in the matter! None can kill a man until his destiny says yes to it. Not even a doctor," he added, chuckling. "Otherwise the doctors would have killed me long ago with jealousy! A man dies when his inner man grows sick and weary of him. Then a pin-prick does it, or a sudden terror. Until that time comes you may break his skull, and do no more than spoil his temper! As a philosopher I have learned two things: respect many, but trust few. But as a doctor I have learned only one thing for certain: that no man actually dies until his soul is tired of him."

"Whose soul should grow sick sooner than that of Commodus?" asked Sextus.

"Not if his soul is evil and delights in evil—as his does!" Galen retorted. "If he should turn virtuous, then perhaps, yes. But in that case we should wish him to live, although his soul would prefer the contrary and leave him to die by the first form of death that should appear—in spite of all the doctors and the guards and tasters of the royal food."

"Some one should convert him then!" said Sextus. "Cornificia, can't Marcia make a Christian of him? Christians pretend to oppose all of the infamies he practises. It would be a merry joke to have a Christian emperor, who died because his soul was sick of him! It would be a choice jest—he being the one who has encouraged Christianity by reversing all Marcus Aurelius' wise precautions against their seditious blasphemy!"

"You speak fanatically, but you have touched the heart of the problem," said Cornificia. "It is Marcia who makes life possible for Commodus—Marcia and her Christians. They help Marcia protect him because he is the only emperor who never persecuted them, and because Marcia sees to it that they are free to meet together without having even to bribe the police. There is only one way to get rid of Commodus: Persuade Marcia that her own life is in danger from him, and that she will have a full voice in nominating his successor."

"Probably true," remarked Pertinax. "Whom would she nominate? That is the point."

"It would be simpler to kill Marcia," said Dædalus. "Thereafter let things take their course. Without Marcia to protect him—"

"No man knows much," Galen interrupted. "Marcia's soul may be all the soul Commodus has! If she should grow sick of him—!"

"She grew sick long ago," said Cornificia. "But she is forever thinking of her Christians and knows no other way to protect them than to make Commodus love her. Ugh! It is like the story of Andromeda. Who is to act Perseus?" *

"There are thirty thousand ways of killing," Pertinax repeated, "but if we kill one monster, four or five others will fight for his place, unless, like Perseus, we have the head of a Medusa with which to freeze them into stone! There is no substitute for Commodus in sight. The only man whose face would freeze all rivals is Severus the Carthaginian!"

"We are none of us blind," said Cornificia.

"You mean me? I am too old," answered Pertinax. "I don't like tyranny, and people know it. It is something they should not know. An old man may be all very well when he has reigned for twenty years and men are used to him, and he used to the task, as was Augustus; but an old man new to the throne lacks energy. And besides, they would never endure a man whose father was a charcoal-seller, as mine was. I have made my way in life by looking at facts and refusing to deceive myself; with the exception of that, I have no especial wisdom, nor any unusual ability."

"If wisdom were all that is needed," said Sextus, "we should put good Galen on the throne!"

"He is too old and wise to let you try to do it!" Galen answered. "But you spoke about the head of a Medusa, Pertinax, and mentioned Lucius Septimius Severus. He commands three legions at Caruntum in

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*In the fable, Andromeda had to be chained to a cliff to be devoured by a monster, in order to save her people from the anger of the god Poseidon. Perseus slew the monster.

Pannonia.* If there is one man living who can freeze men's blood by scowling at them, it is he! And he is not as old as you are."

"I have thought of him only to hate him," said Pertinax. "He would not follow me, nor I him. He is one of three men who would fight for the throne if somebody slew Commodus, although he would not run the risk of slaying him himself, and he would betray us if we should take him into confidence. I know him well. He is a lawyer and a Carthaginian. He would never ask for the nomination; he is too crafty. He would say his legions nominated him against his will and that to have disobeyed them would have laid him open to the punishment for treason.† The other two are Pescennius Niger, who commands the legions in Syria, and Clodius Albinus who commands in Britain. We must find a man who can forestall all three of them by winning, first, the prætorian guard, and then the senate and the Romans by dint of sound reforms and justice."

"You are he! Rome trusts you. So does the senate," said Cornificia. "Marcia trusts me. The prætorian guard trusts her. If I can persuade Marcia that her life is in danger from Commodus—"

"But how?" Dædalus interrupted.

"We can take the prætorian guard by surprize," Cornificia went on, ignoring him. "They can be tricked into declaring for the man whom Marcia's friends nominate. Having once declared for him they will be too proud of having made an emperor, and too unwilling to seem vacillating, to reverse themselves in any man's favor, even though he should command six legions. The senate will gladly accept one who has governed Rome as frugally as Pertinax has done. If the senate confirms the nominee of the prætorian guard, the Roman populace will do the rest by acclamation. Then, three months of upright government—deification by the senate—"

Pertinax laughed explosively—an honest, chesty laugh, unqualified by any subtleties, suggesting a trace of the peasantry from which he sprang. It made Cornificia wince.

"Can you imagine me a god?" he asked.

"I can imagine you an emperor," said Sextus. "It is true, you have no following among the legions just at present. But I make one, and there are plenty of energetic men who think as I do. My friend Norbanus here will follow me. My father—"

NOISES near the open window interrupted him. An argument seemed to be going on between the slaves whom Pertinax had set to keep the roisterers away and some one who demanded admission. Near at hand was a woman's voice, shrilling and scolding. Then another voice—Scylax, the slave who had ridden the red mare. Pertinax strode to the window again and leaned out. Cornificia whispered to Galen:

"If the truth were known, he is afraid of Flavia Titiana. As a wife she is bad enough, but as an empress—"

Galen nodded.

"If you love your Pertinax," he answered, "keep him off the throne! He has too many scruples."

She frowned, having few, which were firm and entirely devoted to Pertinax' fortune.

"Love him? I would give him up to see him deified!" she whispered; and again Galen nodded, deeply understanding.

"That is because you have never had children," he assured her, smiling. "You mother Pertinax, who is more than twice your age—just as Marcia has mothered that monster Commodus until her heart is breaking."

"But I thought you were Pertinax' friend?"

"So I am."

"And his urgent adviser to—"

"Yes, so I was. I have changed my opinion; only the maniacs never do that. Pertinax would make a splendid minister for Lucius Severus; and the two of them could bring back the Augustan days. Persuade him to it. He must forget he hates him."

"Let him come!" said the voice of Pertinax. He was still leaning out, with one hand on a marble pillar, much more interested in the moonlit view of revelry than in the altercation between slaves. He strolled back and stood smiling at Cornificia, his handsome face expressing satisfaction but a rather humorous amusement at his inability to understand her altogether.

"Are you like all other women?" he asked. "I just saw a naked woman stab a man with her hairpin and kick his corpse into the shrubbery before the breath was out of it!"

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*Roughly speaking, the S. W. portion of modern Hungary, whose frontiers were then occupied by very warlike tribes.

†This is what Severus actually did, later on, after Pertinax's death.

"Galen has deserted you," said Cornificia. The murder was uninteresting; nobody made any comment.

"Not he!" Pertinax answered, and went and sat on Galen's couch. "You find me not man enough for the senate to make a god of me—is that it, Galen?"

"Too much of a man to be an emperor," said Galen, smiling amid wrinkles. "By observing a man's virtues one may infer what his faults are. You would try to rule the empire honestly, which is impossible. A more dishonest man would let it rule itself and claim the credit, whereas you would give the praise to others, who would shoulder off the work and all the blame on to you. An empire is like a human body, which heals itself if the head will let it. Too many heads—a conference of doctors—and the patient dies! One doctor, doing nothing with an air of confidence, and the patient gets well! There, I have told you more than all the senate knows!"

Came Scylax, out of breath, less menial than most men's slaves, his head and shoulders upright and the hand that held a letter thrust well forward as if what he had to do were more important than the way he did it.

"This came," he said, standing beside Sextus' couch. "Cadmus brought it, running all the way from Antioch."

His hand was trembling; evidently Cadmus had by some means learned the contents of the letter and had told.

"I and Cadmus—" he said, and then hesitated.

"What?"

"—are faithful, no matter what happens."

Scylax stood erect with closed lips. Sextus broke the seal, merely glancing at Pertinax, taking permission for granted. He frowned as he read, bit his lip, his face growing crimson and white alternately. When he had mastered himself he handed the letter to Pertinax.

"I always supposed you protected my father," he said, struggling to appear calm. But his eyes gave the story away—grieved, mortified, indignant. Scylax offered him his arm to lean on. Norbanus, setting both hands on his shoulders from behind, obliged him to sit down.

"Calm!" Norbanus whispered, "Calm! Your friends are your friends. What has happened?"

Pertinax read the letter and passed it to Cornificia, then paced the floor with hands behind him.

"Is that fellow to be trusted?" he asked with a jerk of his head toward Scylax. He seemed nearly as upset as Sextus was.

Sextus nodded, not trusting himself to speak, knowing that if he did he would insult a man who might be guiltless in spite of appearances.

"Commodus commanded me to visit Antioch, as he said, for a rest," said Pertinax. "The public excuse was, that I should look into the possibility of holding the Olympic games here. Strangely enough, I suspected nothing. He has been flatteringly friendly of late. Those whom I requested him to spare, he spared, even though their names were on his proscription list and I had no better excuse than that they had done no wrong! The day before I left I brought a list to him of names that I commended to his favor—your father's name among them, Sextus."

Pertinax turned his back again and strode toward the window, where he stood like a statue framed in the luminous gloom. The only part of him that moved was his long fingers, weaving together behind him until the knuckles cracked.

Cornificia, subduing her contralto voice, read the letter aloud:

> "To Nimius Secundus Sextus, son of Galienus Maximus, the freedman Rufus Glabrio sends humble greeting.
>
> "May the gods give solace and preserve you. Notwithstanding all your noble father's piety* he was accused of treason and of blasphemy toward the emperor, by whose orders he was seized yesterday and beheaded the same day. The estates have already been seized. It is said they will be sold to Asinus Sejanus, who is probably the source of the accusation against your father.
>
> "I and three other freedmen made our escape and will attempt to reach Tarentum, where we will await instructions from you. Titus, the son of the freedman Paulinus, will convey this letter to Brundisium and thence by boat to Dyrrachium, whence he will send it by post in the charge of a Jew whom he says he can trust.
>
> "It is a certainty that orders will go forth to seize yourself, since the estates in Antioch are known to be of great value. Therefore, we your true friends and devoted servants, urge you to make all speed in escaping. Stay not to make provision for yourself, but travel without encumbrances. Hide! Hasten!
>
> "We commend this letter to you as a sure proof that we ourselves are to be trusted, since, if it should fall into the hands of an informer by the way,

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*This word had not the same significance as nowadays. It referred to respect for elders and superiors, to proper performance of duties toward them.

our lives undoubtedly would pay the forfeit. We have not much money, but enough for the expenses of a journey to a foreign land. The place where we will hide near Tarentum is known to you. In deep anxiety, and not without such sacrifices to the gods and to the *manes* of your noble ancestors as means permit, we will await your coming.

"Rufus Glabrio

"Freedman of the illustrious Galienus Maximus."

PERTINAX turned from the window. "The Jews have a saying," he said, "that who keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from trouble. Often I warned Maximus that he was too free with his speech. He counted too much on my protection. Now it remains to be seen whether Commodus has not proscribed me!"

Sextus and Norbanus stood together, Scylax behind them, Norbanus whispering; plainly enough Norbanus was urging patience—discretion—deliberate thought, whereas Sextus could hardly think at all for anger that reddened his eyes.

"What can I do for you? What can *I* do?" wondered Pertinax.

Then Cornificia was on her feet.

"There is nothing—nothing you can do!" she insisted. She avoided Galen's eyes; the old philosopher was watching her as if she were the subject of some new experiment. "Let Commodus learn as much as that Sextus was here in this pavilion and—"

Sextus interrupted, very proudly:

"I will not endanger my friends. Who will lend me a dagger? This toy that I wear is too short and not sharp. You may forget me, Pertinax. My slaves will bury me. But play you the man and save Rome!"

Then the tribune spoke up. He was younger than all of them.

"Sextus is right. They will know he was here. They will probably torture his slaves and learn about that letter that has reached him. If he runs and hides, we shall all be accused of having helped him to escape; whereas—"

"What?" Galen asked him as he hesitated.

"If he dies by his own hand, he will not only save all his slaves from the torture but remove the suspicion from us and we will still be free to mature our—"

"Cowardice!" Norbanus finished the sentence for him.

"Aye, some of us would hardly feel like noble Romans!" Pertinax said grimly. "Possibly I can protect you, Sextus. Let us think of some great favor you can do the emperor, providing an excuse for me to interfere. I might even take you to Rome with me and—"

Galen laughed, and Cornificia drew in her breath, biting her lip.

"Why do you laugh, Galen?" Pertinax strode over to him and stood staring.

"Because," said Galen, "I know so little after all. I can not tell a beast's blood from a man's. Our Commodus would kill you with all the more peculiar enjoyment because he has flattered you so often publicly and called you 'father Pertinax.' He poisoned his own father; why not you? They will tell him you have frequently befriended Sextus. They will show him Sextus' father's name on that list of names that you commended to his favor. Do you follow me?"

"By Jupiter, not I!" said Pertinax.

"He is sure to learn about this letter that has come," said Galen. "If you, in fearful loyalty to Commodus, should instantly attempt to make a prisoner of Sextus; if, escaping, he is killed, and you bear witness—that would please Commodus almost as much as to see gladiators killed in the arena. If you wept over the death of Sextus, that would please him even more. He would enjoy your feelings. Do you remember how he picked two gladiators who were brothers—twins they were—and when the slayer of his twin-brother saluted, Commodus got down into the arena and kissed him? You yourself must announce to him the news of Sextus' death, and he will kiss you also!"

"Vale!" remarked Sextus. "I die willingly enough."

"You are dead already," Galen answered. "Didn't Pertinax see some one's body kicked into the bushes?"

There was silence. They all glanced at one another. Only Galen, sipping at his wine, seemed philosophically calm.

"I personally should not be an eyewitness," Galen remarked. "I am a doctor, whose certificate of death not even Commodus would doubt. In the dark I might recognize Sextus' garments, even though I could not see his features. And—" he added pointedly—"neither I nor any one can tell a beast's blood from a man's."

"Dædalus!" said Pertinax with sudden resolution. "Get my purse. My slave has it. Sextus shall not go empty-handed."

CHAPTER III

MATERNUS—*LATRO*

SORBANUS brought the skewbald stallion. Not far away a group of women danced around a dozen drunken men, who sang uproariously. Seen against the background of purple and dark-green gloom, with crimson torchlight flaring on the quiet water and the moon descending behind trees beyond them, they were mystically beautiful—seemed not to belong to earth, any more than the pan-pipe music did.

"Ride into their midst!" Norbanus urged, pointing. "Tickle the stallion thus."

The Cappadocian lashed out savagely.

"Here is a bottle of goat's blood. I will bring weapons, and I will join you as soon as possible after I have made sure that the temple priests, and all Daphne, are positive about your death. Now mount and ride!"

Sextus swung on to the stallion's back as if a catapult had thrown him. Until then he had let others do the ordering; he had preferred to let them take their own precautions, form their own plans and subject himself to any course they wished, after which he should be free to face his destiny and fight it without feeling he had handicapped his friends by wilfulness. He had not even issued a direct command to Scylax, his own slave. That was characteristic of him. Nor was it at his suggestion that Norbanus volunteered to share his outlawry. But it was also characteristic that he made no gesture of dissent; he accepted Norbanus' loyalty with a quiet smile that rather scorned words as unnecessary.

Now he drove his heels into the Cappadocian with vigor, for the die was cast. The stallion, impatient of new mastery, reared and plunged, snorted, came back on the bit in an attempt to get it in his teeth, and bolted straight for the group of roisterers, who scattered away, men swearing, women screaming. Throwing back his weight against the reins, he brought the stallion to a plunging, snorting, wheeling halt in the midst of men and women—a terrifying monster blowing clouds of mist out of his nostrils! As they ran he let the brute rear—pulled him over—rolled from under him, and lay still, with goat's blood from the broken bottle splashed around his face and seeming to flow from his mouth. One woman stooped to look, groped for a purse or anything of value, screamed and ran.

"Sextus!" she yelled. "Sextus who was dining in the white pavilion!"

Sextus crawled among the oleanders. Presently Norbanus came, hurrying out of gloom, accompanied by Cadmus, the slave who had brought from Antioch the letter that came from Rome. They were dragging a body between them. They laid it down exactly where Sextus had fallen from the horse. There was a sickening thwack as Cadmus made the face unrecognizable. Then came the lanky, hurrying figure of Pertinax leading a group of people, Cornificia among them—Galen last.

Sextus lay still until all their backs were toward him. Then he crept out of the oleanders and walked along the river-bank in no haste, masking his face with a fold of his toga. He chose a path that wound amid the shrubbery, where marble satyrs grinned in colored lantern light. He had to avoid couples here and there. A woman followed him, laying a hand on his arm; he struck her, and she ran off, screaming for her bully.

Presently he reached the winding track that led toward the high-road, with the gloom of cypresses on either hand and, beyond that, the glow of the lights in the caterers' booths. He was as safe now as if he were fifty miles away; none noticed him except the beggars at the bridges, who exposed maimed limbs and whined for charity. A leper, banking on his only stock in trade —the dread men had of his affliction—cursed him.

"You waste breath," said Sextus and passed on.

He was smiling to himself—sardonically.

"Lepers live by threats—" he thought.

No more than any leper now could he expect protection from society beyond what he could force society to yield. He had no name, for he was dead; that thought amused him. Suddenly it dawned on him how safe he was, since none in Antioch would dare to question the word of Pertinax, backed by Galen and all the witnesses whom Pertinax would be sure to summon. He remembered then to protect the honest freed-men who had sent him warning—strode to a fire near a caterer's booth and burned the letter, stared at by the slaves who warmed their shins around the embers.

One of those might have recognized him, in spite of the toga drawn over his face.

"If any one should ask which way Maternus went, say I have gone home," he commanded, and strode away into the gloom.

He wondered why he had chosen the name Maternus. Not even his remotest ancestor had borne it, yet it came to his lips as naturally, instantly, as if it were his own by right. But as he walked away it came to mind that ten, or possibly twelve, nights ago he and his friends had all been talking of a highwayman Maternus, who had robbed the caravans on the mountain road from Tarsus. For the moment that thought scared him. Should he change the name? The slaves by the embers had stared; they showed him respect, but there was a distinct sensation mingled with it—hardly to be wondered at! Where was it he heard—who told him—that Maternus had been caught? He could not remember.

It dawned on him how difficult it is to decide what to do when the old familiar conditions and the expectations on which we habitually base decisions are all suddenly stripped away. He understood now how a general in the field can fail when suddenly confronted with the unknown. Shall he do this, or do that? There was not a habit or a circumstance to guide him. He must choose, the while the gods looked on and laughed!

Maternus. It was a strange name to adopt, and yet he liked the sound of it, nor would it pass out of his mind. He tried to think of other names, but either they had all been borne by slaves, and were distasteful, or else by famous men or by his friends, whom he did not propose to wrong; he only had to imagine his case reversed to realize how bitterly he would resent it if an outlawed man should take his own name and make it notorious.

Yet he perceived that notoriety would be his only refuge, paradox though that might be. As a mere fugitive, anonymous and having no more object than to live and avoid recognition, he would soon reach the end of his tether; there was little mercy in the world for men without a home or means. Whether recognized or not, he would become like a hunted animal—might, in fact, end as a slave unless he should prefer to prove his identity and submit to Commodus's executioners. Suicide would be preferable to that; but it seemed almost as if the gods themselves had vetoed self-destruction by providing that roisterer's corpse at the critical moment and putting the plan for its use into Galen's wise old head.

He must take the field like Spartacus of old; but he must have a goal more definite and more attainable than Spartacus had had. He must avoid the mistake that weakened Spartacus, of accepting for the sake of numbers any ally who might offer himself. He would have nothing whatever to do with the rabble of runaway slaves, whose only guiding impulse would be loot and license, although he knew how easy it would be to raise such an army if he should choose to do it. Out of any hundred outlaws in the records of a hundred years, some ninety-nine had come to grief through the increasing numbers of their following and lack of discipline; he could think of a dozen who had been betrayed by paid informers of the government, posing as friendly brigands.

And besides, he had no intention of adopting brigandry as a profession, though he realized that he must make a reputation as a brigand if he hoped to be anything else than a helpless fugitive. As a rebel against Commodus it might be possible to raise a good-sized army in a month or two, but that would only serve to bring the Roman armies out of camp, led by generals eager for cheap victories. He must be too resourceful to be taken by police—too insignificant to tempt the legions out of camp.

Brigandry was as distasteful to him and as far beneath his dignity as the pursuit of brigands was beneath the dignity of any of those Roman generals who owed their rank to Commodus. For them, as for himself, the pettiness of brigandry led nowhither. Only one object appealed to them—fame and its perquisites. Only one object appealed to himself: to redeem his estates and to avenge his father. That could be accomplished only by the death of Commodus. He laughed, as he thought of himself pitted alone against Commodus—the deified, mad monster who could marshal the resources of the Roman empire!

Such thoughts filled his mind until he reached the lonely cross-roads, where the narrower, tree-lined road to Daphne met the great main highway leading northward over the mountains. There was the usual row of gibbets reared on rising ground against the sky by way of grim reminder to slaves and other would-be outlaws that the arm of Rome was long, not merciful. Five of the gibbets were vacant, except for an arm on one of them, that swayed in the wind as it hung by a cord from the wrist The sixth had a man on it—dead.

SCYLAX, who was waiting for him, rode out of the gloom on the mare, leading the Cappadocian, and reined in near the gibbet, not quite sure yet who it was who strode toward him. Scared by the stench, the horses became difficult to manage. The leading-rein passed around one of the gibbets. Sextus ran forward to help. The Cappadocian broke the rein and Scylax galloped after him.

So Sextus stood alone beside the rough-hewn tree-trunk, to which was tied the body of a man who had been dead, perhaps, since sunset. He had not been torn yet by the vultures. Morbid curiosity—a fellow feeling for a victim, as the man might well be, of the same injustice that had made an outlaw of himself—impelled Sextus to step closer. He could not see the face, which was drooped forward; but there was a parchment, held spread on a stick, like a sail on a spar, suspended from the man's neck by a string. He snatched it off and held it toward the moon, now low on the horizon. There were only two words, smeared with red paint by a forefinger, underneath the official letters S.P.Q.R.:

"Maternus—*Latro.*"

He began to wonder who Maternus might have been, and how he took the first step that had led to crucifixion. It was hard to believe that any man would run that risk unless impelled to it by some injustice that had changed pride into savagery or else shut off all opportunity for decent living. The cruelty of the form of execution hardly troubled him; the possible injustice of it stirred him to his depths. He felt a sort of superstitious reverence for the victim, increased by the strange coincidence that he had made use, without previous reflection, of Maternus' name.

Presently he saw Norbanus riding the horse that he himself had ridden that afternoon from Antioch to Daphne, followed on a mule by Cadmus, the slave who had brought the letter which had pulled the trigger that set the catapults of destiny in motion. Making a wide circuit, they helped Scylax catch the Cappadocian.

Norbanus came cantering back. He was dressed for the road in a brown woolen tunic contributed by some one in Pertinax' suite. He shook a bag of money.

"Cornificia was generous," he said. "Old Pertinax thought he had done well enough by you. She cried shame on him and threatened to send for her jewelry. So he borrowed money from the priests. You are as dead as that." He looked up at the tortured body of the robber. "What name will you take? We had better begin to get used to it."

"It is written here," said Sextus, showing him the parchment. But the moon had gone down in a smother of silvery cloud; Norbanus could not see to read. "I am Maternus—*Latro.*"

"I was told they had crucified that fellow."

"This is Maternus. Being dead, he will hardly grudge me the use of his name! However, I will pay him for it. He shall have fair burial. Help me down with him."

Norbanus beckoned to the slaves, who tied the horses to a near-by tree. They sought in the dark for a hole that would do for a grave, since they had no burying tools, stumbling on a limestone slab at last, that lay amid rank weeds near a tomb hollowed out of the rock that had been rifled, very likely, centuries ago. They lowered the already stiffened body into it, with a coin in its fingers for Charon's ferry-fare across the Styx, then set the heavy slab in place, all four of them using their utmost strength.

Then Sextus, having poured a little water from his hollowed hands on to the slab, because he had no oil, and having murmured fragments of a ritual as old as Rome, bidding the gods of earth and air and the unseen re-absorb into themselves what man no longer could perceive or cherish or destroy, turned to the two slaves.

"Scylax," he said, "Cadmus—he who was your master is as dead as that man we have buried. I am not Sextus, son of Maximus. I fare forth like a dead man on an unknown road, now being without honor on the lips of men. Nor have I any claim on you, being now an outlaw, whom the law would crucify if ill-luck should betray my feet. Nor can I set you free, since all my household doubtless is already confiscated; ye belong by law to whomsoever Commodus may have appointed to receive my goods. Do then, at your own risk, of your own will, what seems good to you."

Being slaves, they knelt. He bade them rise.

"We follow you," said Scylax, Cadmus murmuring assent.

"Then the night bear witness!" Sextus turned toward the row of gibbets, pointing at them. "That is the risk we take together. If we escape that, you shall not go unrewarded from the fortune I redeem. Norbanus, you accept my leadership?"

Norbanus chuckled.

"I insist on it!" he answered. He, too, pointed at the row of gibbets. "To be frightened will provide us with no armor against destiny! There was little I had to lose; lo, I have left that for the mice to nibble! Let us see what destiny can do to bold men! Lead on, Sextus!"

CHAPTER IV

THE GOVERNORS OF ROME AND ANTIOCH.

DAWN was sparkling on the mountain peaks; the misty violet of half-light crept into the passes and the sun already bathed the copper roofs of Antioch in gleaming gold above a miracle of greenery and marble. Like a sluggish, muddy stream with camel's heads afloat in it, the south-bound caravan poured up against the city gate and spread itself to await inspection by the tax-gatherers, the governor's representatives and the police. There was a tedious procedure of examination, hindered by the swarms of gossipers, the merchants' agents, smugglers, and the men to whom the latest news meant livelihood, who streamed out of the city gate and mingled with the newcomers from Asia, Bythinia, Pontus, Pisidia, Galatia and Cappadocia.

The caravan guards piled their spears and breakfasted apart, their duty done. They had the air of men to whom the constantly repeated marches to and fro on the selfsame stage of a mountainous road had grown displeasing and devoid of all romance. Two were wounded. One, with a dent in the helmet that hung from his arm by the chin-strap, lay leaning against a rock, refused food, and slowly bled to death, his white face almost comically disappointed.

A military tribune, followed by a slave with tablets, and by a mounted trooper for the sake of his official dignity, rode out from the city and took the report from the guards' decurion, a half-breed Dacian-Italian, black-bearded and taciturn, who dictated it to the slave in curt, staccato sentences, grudging the very gesture that he made toward the wounded men. The tribune glanced at the report, signed it, turned his horse and rode into the city, disregarding the decurion's salute, his military cloak a splash of very bright red, seen against the limestone and above the predominant brown of the camels and coats of their owners. He cantered his horse when he passed through the gate, and there went up a clamor of newsy excitement behind him as group after group loosed tongues in competition of exaggeration.

Being bad, the news spread swiftly. The quadruple lines of columns all along the Corso, as the four-mile-long main thoroughfare was called, began to look like pier-piles in a flowing tide of men. Yellow, blue, red, striped and parti-colored costumes, restless as the flotsam on a mill-race, swirled into patterns, and broke, and reblended. The long portico of Cæsar's baths resounded to the hollow hum of voices. Streaming lines of slaves in the midst of the street were delayed by the crowd, and abused for obstructing it. Gossip went up like the voice of the sea to the cliffs and startled clouds of spray-white pigeons, faintly edged with pink against an azure sky; then ceased as suddenly. The news was known. Whatever Antioch knew, bored it. Nine days' wonders were departed long ago into the limbo of the days of Xerxes. Nine hours had come to be the limit of men's interest—nine minutes the crucial phase of excitement, during which the balance of emotion hovered between rioting or laughter.

Antioch grew quiet, conscious of the sunny weather and the springtime lassitude that is a luxury to masters but that slaves must overcome. The gangs went forth to clear the watercourses in advance of floods, whips cracking to inspire zeal. Wagon-loads of flowers, lowing milk-white oxen, white goats—even a white horse, a white ass—oil and wine in painted carts, whose solid wooden wheels screamed on their axles like demons in agony—threaded the streets to the temples, lest the gods forget convenience and send the floods too soon.

The Forum—gilt-edged marble, tinted

statuary, a mosaic pavement like a rich-hued carpet from the looms of Babylon—began to overflow with leisured men of business. Their slaves did all the worrying. The money-changers' clerks sat by the bags of coin, with scales and shovel and the tables of exchange. The chaffering began in corn-shops, where the lawless agreements for delivery of unsown harvests changed hands ten times in the hour, and bills on Rome, scrawled over with endorsements, outsped currency as well as outwitted the revenue men. No tax-farmer's slave could keep track of the flow of intangible wealth when the bills for a million sesterces passed to and fro like cards in an Egyptian game. Men richer than the fabled Crœsus carried all their wealth in leather wallets in the form of mortgages on gangs of slaves, certificates of ownership of cargoes, promises to pay and contracts for delivery of merchandise.

Nine-tenths of all the clamor was the voice of slaves, each one of them an expert in his master's business and often richer than the owners of the men he dealt with, saving his *peculium** to buy his freedom when a more than usually profitable deal should put his master in a good mood.

The hall of the basilica was almost as much a place of fashion as the baths of Julius Cæsar, except that there were some admitted into the basilica whose presence, later in the day, within the precincts of the baths would have led to a riot. Whoever had wealth and could afford to match wits with the sharpest traders in the world might enter the basilica and lounge amid the statuary. Thither well dressed slaves came hurrying with contracts and the news of changing prices. There, on marble benches, spread with colored cushions, at the rear under the balcony, the richer men of business sat chattering to mask their real thoughts—Jews, Alexandrians, Athenians—a Roman here and there, cupidity more frankly written on his face, his eyes a little harder and less subtle, more abrupt in gesture and less patient with delays.

"THAT is a tale which is all very well for the slaves to believe, and for the priests, if they wish, to repeat. As for me, I was born in Tarsus, where no man in his senses believes anything except a bill of sale."

"But I tell you, Maternus was scourged, and then crucified at the place of execution nearest to where he committed his last crime. That is, where the crossroad leads to Daphne. There is no doubt about that whatever. He was nearly four days dying, and the sentries stood guard over him until he ceased to breathe, a little after sunset yesterday evening. So *they* say, at all events. A little before midnight, in Daphne, near one of those booths where the caterers prepare hot meals, a man strode up to where some slaves were seated around a fire. He burned a piece of parchment. All nine slaves agree that he was about Maternus' height and build; that he strode like a man who had been hurt; that he had mud and grass stains on his knees, and covered his face with a toga. They also swear he said he was Maternus, and that he was gone before they could recover their wits. They say his voice was sepulchral. One of the slaves, who can read, declares that the words on the parchment he burned were "Maternus *Latro*," and that it was the identical parchment he had seen hanging from Maternus' neck on the cross. They tortured that slave at once, of course, to get the truth out of him, and on the rack he contradicted himself at least a dozen times, so they whipped him and let him go, because his owner said he was a valuable cook; but the fact remains that the story hasn't been disproved.

"And there is absolutely no doubt whatever about this: The caravan from Asia came in just a little after dawn, having traveled the last stage by night, as usual, in order to arrive early and get the formalities over with. They came past the place of execution before sunrise. They had heard the news of the execution from the northbound caravan that passed them in the mountains. They had all been afraid of Maternus because he had robbed so many wayfarers, so naturally they were interested to see his dead body. It was gone!"

"What of it? Probably the women took it down for burial. Robbers always have a troupe of women. Maternus never had to steal one, so they say. They flocked to him like Bacchanalians."

"No matter. Now listen to this: between the time when they learned of Maternus' execution and their passing the place of execution—that is to say at the narrowest part of the pass, where it curves and begins to descend on this side of the mountain—they were attacked by robbers who made use of Maternus' war-cry. The robbers were beaten off, although they wounded two men of the guard and got away with half-a-dozen horses and a slave-girl."

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* *peculium:* the personal savings, which slaves were sometimes encouraged to accumulate.

"That means nothing— Pardon me a moment while I see what my man has been doing. *What is it, Stilchio? Are you mad? You have contracted to deliver fifty bales at yesterday's price? You want to ruin me? Oh. You are quite sure? Very well—* A good man, that—went out and met the caravan—bought low—sold high, and the price is falling. But as I was saying, your story is simply a string of coincidences. All the robbers use Maternus' war-cry, because of the terror his name inspires; they probably had not heard he had been crucified."

"Well, that was what the caravan folk thought, until they passed the place of execution and saw no body there."

"The robbers possibly themselves removed it and were seeking to avenge Maternus."

"Much more likely somebody was bribed to let him escape! We all know Maternus was scourged, for that was done in Antioch; but they did not scourge him very badly, for fear he might die on the way to the place of execution. There is no doubt he was crucified, but he was only tied, not nailed. It would have been perfectly simple to substitute some other criminal that first night—somebody who looked a little like him; they would give the substitute poppy-juice to keep him from crying out to passers-by."

"Substitution has often been done, of course. But it takes a lot of money and considerable influence to bribe the guard. They are under the authority of a centurion, who would have to look out for informers. And besides, you can't persuade me that a man who had been scourged, and crucified, if only for one day, could walk into Daphne two or three nights afterward and carry on a conversation. Why should he visit Daphne? Why should he choose that place, of all places in the world, and midnight, to destroy the identification parchment? Having destroyed it, why did he then tell the slaves who he was? It sounds like a tale out of Egypt to me."

"Well, the priests are saying—"

"Tchutt-tchutt! Priests say anything."

"Nevertheless, the priests are saying that Maternus, after he was captured, managed to convey a message to his followers commanding them to offer sacrifices to Apollo, who accordingly intervened in his behalf. And they say he undoubtedly went to Daphne to return thanks at the temple threshold."

"Hah-Hah! Excellent! Let us go to the baths. You need to sweat the superstition out of you! Better leave word where we are going, so that our factors will know where to find us in case any important business turns up."

IN THE palace, in the office of the governor, where the lapping of water and irises could be heard through the opened windows, Pertinax sat facing the governor of Antioch across a table heaped with parchment rolls. A dozen secretaries labored in the next room, but the door between was closed; the only witnesses were leisurely, majestic swans, seen down a vista of well pruned shrubbery that flanked the narrow lawn. An awning crimsoned and subdued the sunlight, concealing the lines on the governor's face and suggesting color on his pale cheeks.

He was a fat man, pouched under the eyes and growing bald—an almost total contrast to the lean and active, although older Pertinax. His smile was cynical. His mouth curved downward. He had large, fat hands and cold, dark, calculating eyes.

"I would feel more satisfied," he said, "if I could have Norbanus' evidence."

"Find him then!" Pertinax answered irritably. "What is the matter with your police? In Rome, if I propose to find a man he is brought before me instantly."

"This is not Rome," said the governor, "as you would very soon discover if you occupied my office. I sent a lictor and a dozen men to Norbanus' house, but he is missing and has not been seen, although it is known, and you admit, that he dined with you last night at Daphne. He has no property worth mentioning. His house is under lien to money-lenders. He is well known to have been Sextus' friend, and the moment this order arrived proscribing Sextus I added to it the name of Norbanus in my own handwriting, on the principle that treason keeps bad company.

"My own well known allegiance to the emperor (whom may the *bona dea* bless) obliges me to tear out the very roots of treason at the first suggestion of its presence in our midst. I have long suspected Sextus, who was a cross-grained, obstinate, quick-witted, proud young man—a lot too critical. I am convinced now that he and Norbanus were hatching some kind of plot between them—possibly against the sacred person of our emperor—a frightful sacrilege!—the suggestion of it makes me shudder! There is, of course, no doubt about Sextus; the emperor's own proscription brands him as a miscreant unfit to live, and he was lucky to have died by accident instead of being torn apart by tongs. It seems to me unquestionable that Norbanus shared his guilt and took care to escape before he could be seized and brought to justice. What is in doubt, most noble Pertinax, is how you can excuse yourself to our sacred emperor for having let Sextus escape from your clutches, after you had seen that letter! How can you excuse yourself for not pouncing on the letter, to be used as evidence against rascally freedmen who forewarned the miscreant Sextus about the emperor's intentions?—and for not realizing that Norbanus was undoubtedly in league with him? How you can explain your having let Norbanus get away is something I confess I am unable to imagine."

"Conjure your imagination!" Pertinax retorted. "I am to inquire into the suitability of Antioch or Daphne as the site of the Olympic games that the emperor proposes to preside over in person. You can imagine, I suppose, how profitable that would be for Antioch—and you. Am I to tell the emperor that robbers in the mountains and the laxity of local government make the selection of Antioch unwise?"

They stared at each other silently across the table, Pertinax erect and definite, the governor of Antioch indefinite and stroking his chin with fat, white fingers.

"It would be simplest," said the governor of Antioch at last, "to have Norbanus executed."

"Some one should always be executed when the emperor signs proscription lists!" said Pertinax. "Has it ever occurred to you to wonder how many soldiers in the legions in the distant provinces were certified as dead before they left Rome?"

The governor of Antioch smiled meanly. He resented the suggestion that there might be tricks he did not understand.

"I have a prisoner," he said, "who might be Norbanus. He has been tortured. He refuses to identify himself."

"Does he look like him?"

"That would be difficult to say. He broke into a jeweler's and was very badly beaten by the slaves, who slashed his face, which is heavily bandaged. He appears to be a Roman and is certainly a thief, but beyond that—"

"Much depends on who is interested in him," Pertinax suggested. "Usually a man's relatives—"

But the governor of Antioch's fat hand made a disparaging, careless gesture. "He has no friends. He has been in the *carceres** more than a month. I was reserving him for execution by the lions at the next public games. Truth to tell, I had almost forgotten him. I will write out a warrant for Norbanus' execution and it shall be attended to this morning. And by the way—regarding the Olympic games—"

"The emperor, I think, would like to see them held in Antioch," said Pertinax.

THE merchants strolling to the baths stood curiously for a while to watch one of the rapidly increasing sect of Christians, who leaned from a balcony over the street and exhorted a polyglot crowd of freedmen, slaves and idlers. He was bearded, brown-skinned from exposure, brown-robed, scrawny, vehement.

"Peculiar times!" one merchant said. "If you and I should cause a crowd to gather while we prated about refusal to do homage to the gods—of whom, mind you, the emperor is one, and not the least—"

"But let us listen," said the other.

The man's voice was resonant. He used no tricks of oratory such as Romans overvalued, and was not too careful in the choice of phrases. The Greek idiom he used was unadorned—the language of the marketplace and harbor-front. He made his points directly, earnestly, not arguing but like a guide to far-off countries giving information:

"Slaves—freedmen—masters—all are equal before God, and on the last day all shall rise up from the dead—"

A loiterer heckled him:

"Hah! The crucified too?—what about Maternus?"

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* The cells in which prisoners were kept who had been sentenced to death. Under Roman law there was practically no imprisonment for crime. Fines, flogging, banishment were the substitutes for execution.

The preacher, throwing up his right hand, snatched at opportunity:

"There were two thieves crucified, one on either hand, as I have told you. To the one was said: 'This day shalt thou be with me in paradise'; but to the other nothing. Nevertheless, all shall rise up from the dead on the last day—you, and your friends, and the wise and the fools, and the slave and the free—aye, and Maternus also—"

One merchant grinned to the other:

"Yet I think it was on the first night that Maternus rose up! They stiffen if they stay a whole night on the cross. If he could walk to Daphne three nights later, he had not been crucified many hours. Come, let us go to the baths before the crowd gets there. If one is late those insolent attendants lose one's clothing, and there is no chance whatever of getting a good soft-handed slave to rub one down. Don't you hate to be currycombed by a rascal with corns on his fingers?"

CHAPTER V

ROME—THE THERMÆ OF TITUS

THERE were even birds, to fill the air with music. All the known world, and the far-away mysterious lands of which Alexander's followers had started legends multiplying centuries ago, had contributed to Rome's adornment; plunder and trade goods drifted through in spite of distances. The city had become the vortex of the energy, virility and vice of east and west—a glory of marble and gilded cornices, of domes and spires, of costumes, habits, faces, languages—of gorgeousness and squalor—license, privilege and rigid formalism—extravagance—and of innumerable gods.

There was nobility and love of virtue, cheek by jowl with beastliness, nor was it always easy to discover which was which; but the birds sang blithely in the cages in the portico, where the long seat was on which philosophers discoursed to any one who cared to listen. The baths that the Emperor Titus built were the supreme, last touch of all. From furnaces below-ground, where the whipped slaves sweated in the dark, to domed roof where the doves changed hue amid the gleam of gold and colored glass, they typified Rome, as the city herself was of the essence of the world.

The approach to the Thermæ of Titus was blocked by litters, some heavy enough to be borne by eight matched slaves and large enough for company. Women oftener than men shared litters with friends; then the troupe of attendants was doubled; slaves were in droves, flocks, hordes around the building, making a motley sight of it in their liveries, which were adaptations of the every-day costumes of almost all the countries of the known world.

Under the entrance portico, between the double row of marble columns, sat a throng of fortune-tellers of both sexes, privileged because the ædile of that year had superstitious leanings, but as likely as not to be driven away, and even whipped, when the next man should succeed to office. In and out among the crowd ran tipsters, touts for gambling dens and sellers of charms; most of them found ready customers among the slaves, who had nothing to do but wait, and stare, and yawn until their masters came out from the baths. They were raw, inexperienced slaves who had not a coin or two to spend.

Within the entrance of the Thermæ was a marble court, where better known philosophers discoursed on topics of the day, each to his own group of admirers. A Christian, dressed like any other Roman, held one corner with a crowd around him. There was a tremendous undercurrent of reaction against the prevalent cynical materialism and the vortex of fashion was also the cauldron of new aspirations and the battle-ground of wits.

Beyond the inner entrance were the two disrobing rooms—women to the left, men to the right—where slaves, whose insolence had grown into a cultivated art, exchanged the folded garments for a bracelet with a number. Thence, stark-naked, through the bronze doors set in green-veined marble, bathers passed into the vast *frigidarium*, whose marble plunge was surrounded by a mosaic promenade beneath a bronze and marble balcony.

There men and women mingled indiscriminately, watching the divers, conversing, matching wits, exchanging gossip, some walking briskly around the promenade while others lounged on the marble seats that were interspaced against the wall between the statues.

There was not one gesture of indecency. A man who had stared at a woman would have been thrown out, execrated and forever more refused admission. But out in the street, where the litter-bearers and attendants whiled away the time, there were tales told that spread to the ends of the earth.

ON A bench of black marble, between two statues of the Grecian Muses, Pertinax sat talking with Bultius Livius, sub-prefect of the palace. They were both pink-skinned from plunging in the pool, and the white scars, won in frontier wars, showed all the more distinctly. Bultius Livius was a clean-shaven, sharp-looking man with a thin-lipped air of keenness.

"This dependence on Marcia can easily be overdone," he remarked. His eyes moved restlessly left and right. He lowered his voice. "Nobody knows how long her hold over Cæsar will last. She owns him at present—owns him absolutely—owns Rome. He delights in letting her revoke his orders; it's a form of self-debauchery; he does things purposely to have her overrule him. But that has already lasted longer than I thought it would."

"It will last as long as she and her Christians spy for him and make life pleasant," said Pertinax.

"Exactly. But that is the difficulty," Livius answered, moving his eyes again restlessly. There was not much risk of informers in the Thermæ, but a man never knew who his enemies were. "Marcia represents the Christians, and the idiots won't let well enough alone. By Hercules, they have it all their own way, thanks to Marcia. They are allowed to hold their meetings. All the statutes against them are ignored. They even go unpunished if they don't salute Cæsar's image! They are allowed to preach against slavery. It has got so now that if a man condemned to death pretends he is a Christian they're even allowed to rescue him out of the *carceres!* That's Juno's truth; I know of a dozen instances. But it's the old story: Put a beggar on a horse and he will demand your house next. There's no satisfying them. I am told they propose to abolish the gladiatorial combats! Laugh if you like. I have it from unquestionable sources. They intend to begin by abolishing the execution of criminals in the arena. Shades of Nero! They keep after Marcia day and night to dissuade Cæsar from taking part in the spectacles, on the theory that he helps to make them popular."

"What do they propose to substitute in popular esteem?" asked Pertinax.

"I don't know. They're mad enough for anything, and their hold over Marcia is beyond belief. The next thing you'll know, they'll persuade her it's against religion to be Cæsar's mistress! They're quite capable of sawing off the branch they're sitting on. By Hercules, I hope they do it! Some of us might go down in the scramble, but—"

"Does Marcia give Christian reasons to the emperor?" asked Pertinax, his forehead puzzled.

"No, no. No, by Hercules. No, no. Marcia is as skilful at managing Commodus as he is at hurling a javelin or driving horses. She talks about the dignity of Cæsar and the glory of Rome—uses truth adroitly for her own ends—argues that if he continues to keep company with gladiators and jockeys, and insists on taking part in the combats, Rome may begin to despise him.

"Rome does!" murmured Pertinax, his eyes and lips suggesting a mere flicker of a smile. "But only let Commodus once wake up to the fact and—"

Bultius Livius nodded.

"He will return the compliment and show us how to despise at wholesale, eh? Marcia's life and yours and mine wouldn't be worth an hour's purchase. The problem is, who shall warn Marcia? She grows intolerant of friendly hints. I made her a present the other day of eight matched German litter-bearers—beauties—they cost a fortune—and I took the opportunity to have a chat with her. She told me to go home and try to manage my own wife! Friendly enough—she laughed—she meant no enmity; but shrewd though she is, and far-seeing though she is, the wine of influence is going to her head. You know what that portends. Few men, and fewer women, can drink deeply of that wine and—"

"She comes," said Pertinax.

There was a stir near the bronze door leading to the women's disrobing hall. Six women in a group were answering greetings, Marcia in their midst, but no man in the Thermæ looked at them a moment longer than was necessary to return the wave of the hand with which Marcia greeted every one before walking down the steps into the plunge. She did not even wear the customary bracelet with its numbered metal disk; not even the attendants at the Thermæ would presume to lose the clothing of the mistress of the emperor. Commodus, who at the age of twelve had flung a slave into the furnace because the water was too hot, would have made short work of any one who mislaid Marcia's apparel.

She did not belie her reputation. It was no wonder that the sculptors claimed that every new Venus they turned out was Marcia's portrait. Her beauty, as her toes touched water, was like that of Aphrodite rising from the wave. The light from the dome shone golden on her brown hair and her glossy skin. She was a thing of sensuous delight, incapable of coarseness, utterly untouched by the suggestion of vulgarity, and yet—

"It is strange she should take up with fancy religions," said Pertinax under his breath.

She was pagan in every gesture, and not a patrician. That was indefinable but evident to trained eyes. Neither he, who knew her intimately, nor the newest, newly shaven son of a provincial for the first time exploring the wonders of Rome, could have imagined her as anything except a rich man's mistress.

She plunged into the pool and swam like a mermaid, her companions following, climbed out at the farther end, where the diving-boards projected in tiers, one above the other, and passed through a bronze door into the first of the sweating rooms, evidently conscious of the murmur of comment that followed her, but taking no overt notice of it.

"Who is to be the next to try to reason with her—you?" asked Bultius Livius.

"No, not I. I have shot my bolt," said Pertinax and closed his eyes, as if to shut out something from his memory—or possibly to banish thoughts he did not relish. There came a definite, hard glint into Livius's eyes; he had a name for being sharper to detect intrigue and its ramifications than even the sharp outline of his face would indicate.

"You have heard of her latest indiscretion?" he asked, narrowly watching Pertinax. "There is a robber at large, named Maternus—you have heard of him? The man appears and disappears. Some say he is the same Maternus who was crucified near Antioch at about the time when you were there; some say he isn't. He is reported to visit Rome in various disguises, and to be able to conduct himself so well that he can pass for a patrician. Some say he has a large band; some say, hardly any followers. Some say it was he who robbed the emperor's own mail a month ago. He is reported to be here, there, everywhere; but there came at last reliable information that he lives in a cave in the woods on an estate that fell to the *fiscus** at the time when Maximus and his son Sextus were proscribed."

Pertinax looked bored. He yawned.

"I think I will go in and sweat a while," he remarked.

"Not yet. Let me finish," said Livius. "It was reported to Cæsar that the highwayman Maternus lives in a cave on this Aventine estate, and that the slaves and tenants on the place, who, of course, all passed to the new owner when the estate was sold, not only tolerate him but supply him with victuals and news. Cæsar went into one of his usual frenzies, cursed half the senators by name, and ordered out a cohort from a legion getting ready to embark at Ostia. He ordered them to lay waste the estate, burn all the woods and if necessary torture the slaves and tenants, until they had Maternus. Dead or alive, they were not to dare to come without him, and meanwhile the rest of the legion was kept waiting at Ostia, with all the usual nuisance of desertions and drunkenness and what not else."

"Everybody knows about that," said Pertinax. "As governor of Rome it was my duty to point out to the emperor the inconvenience of keeping that legion waiting under arms so near the city. I was snubbed for my pains, but I did my duty."

"*Your* duty? There were plenty of people more concerned than you," said Livius, looking again as if he thought he had detected an intrigue. "There were the Ostian authorities, for instance, but I did not hear of their complaining."

"Naturally not," said Pertinax, suppressing irritation. "Every day the legion lingered there meant money for the enterprising city fathers. I am opposed to all the petty pouching of commissions that goes on."

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*The government department into which all payments were made, corresponding roughly to a modern treasury department, but combining the duties of a court of chancery.

"Doubtless. Being governor of Rome, you naturally—"

"I have heard of peculations at the palace," Pertinax interrupted.

"Be that as it may, Commodus ordered out the cohort, sent it marching and amused himself inventing new ingenious torments for Maternus. Alternatively, he proposed to himself to have the cohort slaughtered in the arena, officers and all, if they should fail of their mission; so it was safe to wager they were going to bring back some one said to be Maternus, whether or not they caught the right man. Commodus was indulging in one of his storms of imperial righteousness. He was going to stamp out lawlessness. He was going to make it safe for any one to come or go along the Roman roads. Oh, he was in a fine Augustan mood. It wasn't safe for any one but Marcia to come within a mile of him. Scowl—you know that scowl of his—it freezes the very sentries on the wall if he looks at their backs through the window! I don't suppose there was a woman in Rome just then who would have cared to change places with Marcia! He sent for her, and half the palace betted she was ripe for banishment to one of those island retreats where Crispina* lived less than a week! But Marcia is fertile of surprizes. She won't surprize me if she outlives Commodus—by Hercules, she won't surprize me if—"

He stared at Pertinax with impudently keen eyes. Pertinax looked at the bronze door leading to the sweating room, shrugging himself as if the *frigidarium* had grown too cool for comfort.

"Marcia actually persuaded Commodus to countermand the order!" Livius said, emphasizing each word. "Almighty Jove can only guess what argument she used, but if Maternus had been one of her pet Christians she couldn't have saved him more successfully. Commodus sent a messenger post-haste that night to recall the cohort."

"And a good thing too," Pertinax remarked. "It isn't a legion's business to supply cohorts to do the work of the district police. There were five thousand raw men on the verge of mutiny in Ostia—"

"And—wait a minute—*and*," said Livius, "don't go yet—this is interesting: Marcia, that same night, sent a messenger of her own to find Maternus and to warn him."

"How do you know?" Pertinax let a sign of nervousness escape him.

"In the palace, those of us who value our lives and our fortunes make it a business to know what goes on," Livius answered with a dry laugh, "just as you take care to know what goes on in the city, Pertinax."

The older man looked worried.

"Do you mean it is common gossip in the palace?" he demanded.

"You are the first man I have spoken with. There are therefore only three who know, if you count the slave whom Marcia employed; four if you count Marcia. I had the great good luck not long ago to catch that slave *in flagrante delicto*—never mind what he was doing; that is another story altogether—and he gave me an insight into a number of useful secrets. The point is, that particular slave takes care not to run errands nowadays without informing me. There is not much that Marcia does that I don't know about."

Livius' eyes suggested gimlets boring holes into Pertinax' face. Not a change of the other's expression escaped him. Pertinax covered his mouth with his hand, pretending to yawn. He slapped his thighs to suggest that his involuntary shudder was due to having sat too long. But he did not deceive Livius.

"It is known to me," said Livius, "that you and Marcia are in each other's confidence."

"That makes me doubt your other information," Pertinax retorted. "No man can jump to such a ridiculous conclusion and call it knowledge without making me doubt him on all points. You bore me, Livius. I have important business waiting; I must make haste into the sweating room and get that over with."

But Livius' sharp, nervous laugh arrested him.

"Not yet, friend Pertinax! Let Rome wait! Rome's affairs will outlive both of us. I suspect you intend to tell Marcia to have my name included in the next proscription list! But I am not quite such a simpleton as that. Sit down and listen. I have proof that you plotted with the governor of Antioch to have an unknown criminal executed in place of a certain Norbanus, who escaped with your connivance and has since become a follower of the highwayman Maternus. That involves you rather seriously, doesn't it! You see, I made sure of my facts before approaching you. And now—admit that I approached you tactfully! Come, Pertinax, I made no threats until you let me see I was in danger. I admire you. I regard you as a brave and an honorable Roman. I propose that you and I shall understand each other. You must take me into confidence, or I must take steps to protect myself."

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*Crispina, wife of Commodus, who was banished to the isle of Capreae and there secretly put to death.

There was a long pause while a group of men and women came and chattered near by, laughing while one of the men tried to win a wager by climbing a marble pillar. Pertinax frowned. Livius did his best to look dependable and friendly, but his eyes were not those of a boon companion.

"You are incapable of loyalty to any one except yourself," said Pertinax at last. "What pledge do you propose to offer me?"

"A white bull to Jupiter Capitolinus! I am willing to go with you to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, and to swear on the altar whatever solemn oath you wish."

Pertinax smiled cynically.

"The men who slew Julius Cæsar were under oath to him," he remarked. "Most solemn oaths they swore, then turned on one another like a pack of wolves! Octavian and Anthony were under oath; and how long did that last? My first claim to renown was based on having rewon the allegiance of our troops in Britain, who had broken the most solemn oath a man can take—of loyalty to Rome. An oath binds nobody. It simply is an emphasis of what a man intends that minute. It expresses an emotion. I believe the gods smile when they hear men pledge themselves. I personally, who am far less than a god and far less capable of reading men's minds, never trust a man unless I like him, or unless he gives me pledges that make doubt impossible."

"Then you don't like me?" asked Livius.

"I would like you better if I knew that I could trust you."

"You shall, Pertinax! Bring witnesses! I will commit myself before your witnesses to do my part in—"

His restless eyes glanced right and left. Then he lowered his voice.

"—in bringing about the political change you contemplate."

"Let us go to the sweating room," Pertinax answered. "Keep near me. I will think this matter over. If I see you holding speech not audible to me, with any one—"

"I am already pledged. You may depend on me," said Livius. "I trust you more because you use caution. Come."

CHAPTER VI

THE EMPEROR COMMODUS

THE imperial palace was a maze of splendor such as Babylon had never seen. It had its own great aqueducts to carry water for its fountains, for the gardens and for the imperial baths that were as magnificent, if not so large, as the Thermæ of Titus. Palace after palace had been wrecked, remodeled and included in the whole, under the succeeding emperors, until the imperial quarters on the Palatine had grown into a city within a city.

There were barracks for the prætorian guard that lacked not much of being a fortress. Rooms and stairways for the countless slaves were like honeycomb cells in the dark foundations. There were underground passages, some of them secret, some notorious, connecting wing with wing; and there was one, for the emperor's private use, that led to the great arena where the games were held, so that he might come and go with less risk of assassination.

Even temples had been taken over and included within the surrounding wall to make room for the ever-multiplying suites of state apartments, as each Cæsar strove to outdo the magnificence of his predecessor. Oriental marble, gold-leaf, exotic trees, silk awnings, fountains, the majestic figures of the guards, the bronze doors and the huge height of the buildings, awed even the Romans who were used to them.

The throne-room was a place of such magnificence that it was said that even Cæsar himself felt small in it. The foreign kings, ambassadors and Roman citizens admitted there to audience were disciplined without the slightest difficulty; there was no unseemliness, no haste, no crowding; horribly uncomfortable in the heavy togas that court etiquette prescribed, reminded of their dignity by colossal statues of the noblest Romans of antiquity, and ushered by magnificently uniformed past masters of the art of ceremony, all who entered felt that they were insignificant intruders into a golden mystery. The palace prefect in his cloak of cloth of gold, with his ivory wand of office, seemed a high priest of eternity; subprefects, standing in the marble antechamber to examine visitors' credentials and see that none passed in improperly attired, were keepers of Olympus.

The gilded marble throne was on a dais approached by marble steps, beneath a balcony to which a stair ascended from behind a carved screen. Trumpets announced the approach of Cæsar, who could enter unobserved through a door at the side of the dais. From the moment that the trumpet sounded, and the guards grew as rigid as the basalt statues in the niches of the columned walls, it was a punishable crime to speak or even to move until Cæsar appeared and was seated.

Nor was Cæsar himself an anticlimax. Even Nero, nerveless in his latter days, when self-will and debauchery had pouched his eyes and stomach, had possessed the Roman gift of standing like a god. Vespasian and Titus, each in turn, was Mars personified. Aurelius had typified a gentler phase of Rome, a subtler dignity, but even he, whose worst severity was tempered by the philosophical regret that he could not kill crime with kindliness, had worn the imperial purple like Olympus' delegate.

COMMODUS, in the minutes that he spared from his amusements to accept the glamor of the throne, was perfect. Handsomest of all the Cæsars, he could act his part with such consummate majesty that men who knew him intimately half-believed he was a hero after all. Athletic, muscular and systematically trained, his vigor, that was purely physical, passed readily for spiritual quality within that golden hall, where the resources of the world were all put under tribute to provide a royal setting. He emerged. He smiled, as if the sun shone. He observed the rolled petitions, greetings, testimonials of flattery from private citizens and addresses of adulation from distant cities, being heaped into a gilded basket as the silent throng filed by beneath him. He nodded. Now and then he scowled, his irritation growing as the minutes passed. At each gesture of impatience the subprefects quietly impelled the crowd to quicker movement.

But at the end of fifteen minutes Commodus grew tired of dignity and his ferocious scowl clouded his face like a thunderstorm.

"Am I to sit here while the whole world makes itself ridiculous by staring at me?" he demanded, in a harsh voice. It was loud enough to fill the throne-room, but none knew whether it was meant for an aside or not and none dared answer him. The crowd continued flowing by, each raising his right hand and bowing as he reached the square of carpet that was placed exactly in front of Cæsar's throne.

Commodus rose to his feet. All movement ceased then and there was utter silence. For a moment he stood scowling at the crowd, one hand resting on the golden lion's head that flanked the throne. Then he laughed.

"Too many petitions!" he sneered, pointing at the overflowing basket; and in another moment he had vanished through the door behind the marble screen.

Met and escorted up the stairs by groups of cringing slaves, he reached a columned corridor. Rich carpets lay on the mosaic floor; sunlight, from under the awnings of a balcony glorious with potted flowers, shone on the colored statuary and the Grecian paintings.

"What are all these women doing?" he demanded.

There were girls, half-hidden behind the statues, each one trying, as he passed her, to divine his mood and to pose attractively.

"Where is Marcia? What will she do to me next? Is this some new scheme of hers to keep me from enjoying my manhood? Send them away! The next girl I catch in the corridor shall be well whipped. Where is Marcia?"

Throwing away his toga for a slave to catch and fold he turned between gilded columns, through a bronze door, into the antechamber of the royal suite. There a dozen gladiators greeted him as if he were the sun shining out of the clouds after a month of rainy weather.

"This is better!" he exclaimed. "Ho, there, Narcissus! Ho, there, Horatius! Ha! So you recover, Albinus? What a skull the man has! Not many could take what I gave him and be on their feet again within the week! You may follow me, Narcissus. But where is Marcia?"

Marcia called to him through the curtained door that led to the next room—

"I am waiting, Commodus."

"By Jupiter, when she calls me Commodus it means an argument! Are some more of her Christians in the *carceres*, I wonder? Or has some new highwayman—By Juno's breasts, I tremble when she calls me Commodus!"

The gladiators laughed. He made a pass at one of them, tripped him, scuffled a moment and raised him struggling in the air, then flung him into the nearest group, who broke his fall and set him on his feet again.

"Am I strong enough to face my Marcia?" he asked and, laughing, passed into the other room, where half a dozen women grouped themselves around the imperial mistress.

"What now?" he demanded. "Why am I called Commodus?"

He stood magnificent, with folded arms, confronting her, play-acting the part of a guiltless man arraigned before the magistrate.

"O Roman Hercules," she said, "I spoke in haste, you came so much sooner than expected. What woman can remember you are anything but Cæsar when you smile at her? I am in love, and being loved, I am—"

"Contriving some new net for me, I'll wager! Come and watch the new men training with the cæstus; I will listen to your plan for ruling me and Rome while the sight of a good set-to stirs my genius to resist your blandishments!"

"Cæsar," she said, "speak first with me alone."

Instantly his manner changed. He made a gesture of impatience. His sudden scowl frightened the women standing behind Marcia, although she appeared not to notice it, with the same peculiar trick of seeming not to see what she did not wish to seem to see that she had used when she walked naked through the Thermæ.

"Send your scared women away then," he retorted. "I trust Narcissus. You may speak before him."

Her women vanished, hurrying into another room, the last one drawing a cord that closed a jingling curtain.

"Do you not trust me?" asked Marcia. "And is it seemly, Commodus, that I should speak to you before a gladiator?"

"Speak or be silent!" he grumbled, giving her a black look, but she did not seem to notice it. Her genius—the secret of her power—was to seem forever imperturbable and loving.

"Let Narcissus bear witness then; since Cæsar bids me, I obey! Again and again I have warned you, Cæsar. If I were less your slave and more your sycophant I would have tired of warning you. But none shall say of Marcia that her Cæsar met Nero's fate, whose women ran away and left him. Not while Marcia lives shall Commodus declare he has no friends!"

"Who now?" he demanded angrily. "Get me my tablet! Come now, name me your conspirators and they shall die before the sun sets!"

When he scowled his beauty vanished, his eyes seeming to grow closer like an ape's. The mania for murder that obsessed him tautened his sinews. Cheeks, neck, forearms swelled with knotted strength. Ungovernable passion shook him.

"Name them!" he repeated, beckoning unconsciously for the tablet that none dared thrust into his hand.

"Shall I name all Rome?" asked Marcia, stepping closer, pressing herself against him. "O Hercules, my Roman Hercules—does love, that makes us women see, put bandages on men's eyes? You have turned your back upon the better part of Rome to—"

"Better part?" He shook her by the shoulders, snorting. "Liars, cowards, ingrates, strutting peacocks, bladders of wind boring me and one another with their empty phrases, cringing lick-spittles—they make me sick to look at them! They fawn on me like hungry dogs. By Jupiter, I make myself ridiculous too often, pandering to a lot of courtiers! If they despise me then as I despise myself, I am in a bad way! I must make haste and live again! I will get the stench of them out of my nostrils and the sickening sight of them out of my eyes by watching true men fight! When I slay lions with a javelin, or gladiators—"

"You but pander to the rabble," Marcia interrupted. "So did Nero. Did they come to his aid when the senate and his friends deserted him?"

"Don't interrupt me, woman! Senate! Court!" he snorted. "I can rout the senate with a gesture! I will fill my court with gladiators! I can change my ministers as often as I please—aye, and my mistress too," he added, glaring at her. "Out with the names of these new conspirators who have set you trembling for my destiny!"

"I know none—not yet," she said. "I can feel, though. I hear the whispers in the Thermæ—"

"By Jupiter, then I will close the Thermæ."

"When I pass through the streets I read men's faces—"

"Snarled, have they? My prætorian guard shall show them what it is to be bitten! Mobs are no new things in Rome. The old way is the proper way to deal with mobs! Blood, corn and circuses, but principally blood! By the Dioscuri, I grow weary of your warnings, Marcia!"

He thrust her away from him and went growling like a bear into his own apartment, where his voice could be heard cursing the attendants whose dangerous duty it was to divine in an instant what clothes he would wear and to help him into them. He came out naked through the door, saw Marcia talking to Narcissus, laughed and disappeared again. Marcia raised her voice:

"Telamonion! Oh, Telamonion!"

A curly-headed Greek boy hardly eight years old came running from the outer corridor—all laughter—one of those spoiled favorites of fortune whom it was the fashion to keep as pets. Their usefulness consisted mainly in retention of their innocence.

"Telamonion, go in and play with him. Go in and make him laugh. He is bad tempered."

Confident of everybody's good-will, the child vanished through the curtains where Commodus roared him a greeting. Marcia continued talking to Narcissus in a low voice.

"When did you see Sextus last?" she asked.

"But yesterday."

"And what has he done, do you say? Tell me that again."

"He has found out the chiefs of the party of Lucius Septimius Severus. He has also discovered the leaders of Pescennius Niger's party. He says, too, there is a smaller group that looks toward Clodius Albinus, who commands the troops in Britain."

"Did he tell you names?"

"No. He said he knew I would tell you, and you might tell Commodus, who would write all the names on his proscription list. Sextus, I tell you, reckons his own life nothing, but he is extremely careful for his friends."

"It would be easy to set a trap and catch him. He is insolent. He has had too much rein," said Marcia.

"But what would be the use?" Narcissus answered. "There would be Norbanus, too, to reckon with. Each plays into the other's hands. Each knows the other's secrets. Kill one, and there remains the other—doubly dangerous because alarmed. They take turns to visit Rome, the other remaining in hiding with their following of freedmen and educated slaves. They only commit just enough robbery to gain themselves an enviable reputation on the countryside. They visit their friends in Rome in various disguises, and they travel all over Italy to plot with the adherents of this faction or the other. Sextus favors Pertinax—says he would make a respectable emperor—another Marcus Aurelius. But Pertinax knows next to nothing of Sextus' doings, although he protects Sextus as far as he can and sees him now and then. Sextus' plan is to keep all three rival factions by the ears, so that if anything should happen—" he nodded toward the curtain, from behind which came the sounds of childish laughter and the crashing voice of Commodus encouraging in some piece of mischief—"they would be all at odds and Pertinax could seize the throne."

"I wonder whether I was mad that I protected Sextus!" exclaimed Marcia. "He has served us well. If I had let them catch and crucify him as Maternus, we would have had no one to keep us informed of all these cross-conspiracies. But are you sure he favors Pertinax?"

"Quite sure. He even risked an interview with Flavia Titiana, to implore her influence with her husband. Sextus would be all for striking now, this instant; he has assured himself that the world is tired of Commodus, and that no faction is strong enough to stand in the way of Pertinax; but he knows how difficult it will be to persuade Pertinax to assert himself. Pertinax will not hear of murdering Cæsar; he says: 'Let us see what happens—if the Fates intend me to be Cæsar, let the Fates show how!' "

"Aye, that is Pertinax!" said Marcia. "Why is it that the honest men are all such *cunctators!* * As for me, I will save my Commodus if he will let me. If not, the prætorian guard shall put Pertinax on the throne before any other faction has a chance to move. Otherwise we all die—all

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* Lit. "delayers." Fabius, the great Roman general opposed to Hannibal, became known as *cunctator* because of his deliberately dilatory tactics. The word became an epithet.

of us! Severus—Pescennius Niger—Clodius Albinus—any of the others would include us in a general proscription. Pertinax is friendly. He protects his friends. He is the safest man in all ways. Let Pertinax be acclaimed by the prætorian guard and the senate would accept him eagerly enough. They would feel sure of his mildness. Pertinax would do no wholesale murdering to wipe out opposition; he would try to pacify opponents by the institution of reforms and decent government."

"You must beware you are not forestalled," Narcissus warned her. "Sextus tells me there is more than one man ready to slay Commodus at the first chance. Severus, Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus keep themselves informed as to what is going on; their messengers are in constant movement. If Commodus should lift a hand against either of those three, that would be the signal for civil war. All three would march on Rome."

"Cæsar is much more likely to learn of the plotting through his own informers, and to try to terrify the generals by killing their supporters here in Rome," said Marcia. "What does Sextus intend? To kill Cæsar himself?"

Narcissus nodded.

"Well, when Sextus thinks that time has come, you kill *him!* Let that be your task. We must save the life of Commodus as long as possible. When nothing further can be done, we must involve Pertinax so that he won't dare to back out. It was he, you know, who persuaded me to save Maternus the highwayman's life; it was he who told me Maternus is really Sextus, son of Maximus. His knowledge of that secret gives me a certain hold on Pertinax! Cæsar would have his head off at a word from me. But the best way with Pertinax is to stroke the honest side of him—the charcoal-burner side of him—the peasant side, if that can be done without making him too diffident. He is perfectly capable of offering the throne to some one else at the last minute!"

A step sounded on the other side of the curtain.

"Cæsar!" Narcissus whispered. As excuse for being seen in conversation with her he began to show her a charm against all kinds of treachery that he had bought from an Egyptian. She snatched it from him.

"Cæsar!" she exclaimed, bounding toward Commodus and standing in his way. Not even she dared lay a hand on him when he was in that volcanic mood. "As you love me, will you wear this?"

"For love of you, what have I not done?" he retorted, smiling at her. "What now?"

She advanced another half-step, but no nearer. There was laughter on his lips, but in his eye cold cruelty.

"My Cæsar, wear it! It protects against conspiracy."

He showed her a new sword that he had girded on along with the short tunic of a gladiator.

"Against the bellyache, use Galen's pills; but this is the right medicine against conspiracy!" he answered. Then he took the little golden charm into his left hand, tossed it on his palm and looked at her, still smiling.

"Where did you get this bauble?"

"Not I. One of those magicians who frequent that Forum sold it to Narcissus."

"Bah!" He flung it through the window. "Who is the magician? Name him! I will have him thrown into the *carceres.* We'll see whether the charms he sells so cheap are any good! Or is he a Christian?" he asked, sneering.

"The Christians, you know, don't approve of charms," Marcia answered.

"By Jupiter, there's not much that they do approve of!" he retorted. "I begin to weary of your Christians. I begin to think Nero was right, and my father, too! There was wisdom in treating Christians as vermin! It might not be a bad thing, Marcia, to warn your Christians to procure themselves a charm or two against my weariness of their perpetual efforts to govern me! The Christians, I suppose, have been telling you to keep me out of the arena? Hence this living statuary in the corridor, and all this talk about the dignity of Rome! Tscharr-rrh! There's more dignity about one gladiator's death than in all Rome outside the arena! Woman, you forget you are only a woman. I remember that! I am a god! I have the blood of Cæsar in my veins. And like the unseen gods, I take my pleasure watching men and women die! I loose my javelins like thunderbolts—like Jupiter himself! Like Hercules—"

He paused. He noticed Marcia was laughing. Only she, in all the Roman empire, dared to mock him when he boasted.

Not even she knew why he let her do it. He began to smile again, the frightful frown that rode over his eyes dispersing, leaving his forehead as smooth as marble.

"If I should marry you and make you empress," he said, "how long do you think I should last after that? You are clever enough to rule the fools who squawk and jabber in the senate and the Forum. You are beautiful enough to start another siege of Troy! But remember: You are Cæsar's concubine, not empress! Just remember that, will you! When I find a woman lovelier than you, and wiser, I will give you and your Christians a taste of Nero's policy. Now—do you love me?"

"If I did not, could I stand before you and receive these insults?" she retorted, trusting to the inspiration of the moment; for she had no method with him.

"I would willingly die," she said, "if you would give the love you have bestowed on me to Rome instead, and use your godlike energy in ruling wisely, rather than in killing men and winning chariot races. One Marcia does not matter much. One Commodus can—"

"Can love his Marcia!" he interrupted, with a high-pitched laugh. He seized her, nearly crushing out her breath. "A Caius and a Caia we have been! By Jupiter, if not for you and Paulus I would have left Rome long ago to march in Alexander's wake! I would have carved me a new empire that did not stink so of politicians!"

He strode into the anteroom where all the gladiators waited and Narcissus had to follow him—well named enough, for he was lithe and muscular and beautiful, but, nonetheless, though taller, not to be compared with Commodus—even as the women, chosen for their good looks and intelligence, who hastened to reappear the moment the emperor's back was turned, were nothing like so beautiful as Marcia.

In all the known world there were no two finer specimens of human shapeliness than the tyrant who ruled and the woman whose wits and daring had so long preserved him from his enemies.

"Come to the arena," he called back to her. "Come and see how Hercules throws javelins from a chariot at full pelt!"

But Marcia did not answer, and he forgot her almost before he reached the entrance of the private tunnel through which he passed to the arena. She had more accurately aimed and nicely balanced work to do than even Commodus could do with javelins against a living target.

CHAPTER VII

MARCIA.

IN EVERYTHING but title and security of tenure Marcia was empress of the world, and she had what empresses most often lack—the common touch. She had been born in slavery. She had ascended step by step to fortune, by her own wits, learning by experience. Each layer of society was known to her—its virtues, prejudices, limitations and peculiar tricks of thought. Being almost incredibly beautiful, she had learned very early in life that the desired (not always the desirable) is powerful to sway men; the possessed begins to lose its sway; the habit of possession easily succumbs to boredom, and then power ceases. Even Commodus, accordingly, had never owned her in the sense that men own slaves; she had reserved to herself self-mastery, which called for cunning, courage and a certain ruthlessness, albeit tempered by a reckless generosity.

She saw life sceptically, undeceived by the fawning flattery that Rome served up to her, enjoying it as a cat likes being stroked. They said of her that she slept with one eye open.

Livius had complained in the Thermæ to Pertinax that the wine of influence was going to Marcia's head, but he merely expressed the opinion of one man, who would have liked to feel himself superior to her and to use her for his own ends. She was not deceived by Livius or by anybody else. She knew that Livius was keeping watch on her, and how he did it, having shrewdly guessed that a present of eight matched litter-bearers was too extravagant not to mask ulterior designs. She watched him much more artfully than he watched her. Her secret knowledge that he knew her secret was more dangerous to him than anything that he had found out could be dangerous to her.

THE eight matched litter-bearers waited with the gilded litter near a flight of marble steps that descended from the door of Marcia's apartments in the palace to a sunlit garden with a fountain in the midst. There was a crowd of servants and four Syrian eunuchs, sleek offensive menials in yellow robes; two lictors besides, with fasces and the Roman civic uniform—a scandalous abuse of ancient ceremony—ready to conduct a progress through the city. But they all yawned. Marcia and her usual companion did not come; there was delay—and gossip, naturally.

A yawning eunuch rearranged the bowknot of his girdle.

"What does she want with Livius? He usually gets sent for when somebody needs punishing. Who do you suppose has fallen foul of her?"

"Himself! He sent her messenger back with word he was engaged on palace business. I heard her tell the slave to go again and not return without him! Bacchus! But it wouldn't worry me if Livius should lose his head! For an aristocrat he has more than his share of undignified curiosity—forever poking his sharp nose into other people's business. Marcia may have found him out. Let's hope!"

At the foot of the marble stairway, in the hall below Marcia's apartment, Livius stood remonstrating, growing nervous. Marcia, dressed in the dignified robes of a Roman matron, that concealed even her ankles and suggested the demure, self-conscious rectitude of olden times, kept touching his breast with her ivory fan, he flinching from the touch, subduing irritation.

"If the question is, what I want with you, Livius, the answer is, that I invite you. Order your litter brought."

"But Marcia, I am subprefect. I am responsible to—"

"Did you hear?"

"But if you will tell where we are going, I might feel justified in neglecting the palace business. I assure you I have important work to do."

"There are plenty who can attend to it," said Marcia. "The most important thing in your life, Livius, is my good-will. You are delaying me."

Livius glared at Caia Poppeia, the lady-in-waiting, who was smiling, standing a little behind Marcia. He hoped she would take the hint and withdraw out of earshot, but she had had instructions, and came half a step closer.

"Will you let me go back to my office and—"

"No!" answered Marcia.

He yielded with a nervous gesture, that implored her not to make an indiscretion. A subprefect, in the nature of his calling, had too many enemies to relish repetition in the palace precincts of a threat from Marcia, however baseless it might be. And besides, it might be something serious that almost had escaped her lips. Untrue or true, it would be known all over the palace in an hour; within the day all Rome would know of it. There were two slaves by the front door, two more on the last step of the stairs.

"I will come, of course," he said. "I am delighted. I am honored. I am fortunate!"

She nodded. She sent one of her own slaves to order his private litter brought, while Livius attempted to look comfortable, cudgeling his brains to know what mischief she had found out. It was nothing unusual that his litter should follow hers through the streets of Rome; in fact, it was an honor coveted by all officials of the palace, that fell to his share rather frequently because of his distinguished air of a latter-day man of the world and his intimate knowledge of everybody's business and ancestry. He was often ordered to go with her at a moment's notice. But this was the first time she had refused to say where they were going, or why, and there was a hint of malice in her smile that made his blood run cold. He was a connoisseur of malice.

Marcia leaned on his arm as she went down the steps to her litter. She permitted him to help her in. But then, while her companion was following through the silken curtains, she leaned out at the farther side and whispered to the nearest eunuch. Livius, climbing into his own gilt vehicle and lifted shoulder-high by eight Numidians, became aware that Marcia's eunuchs had been told to keep an eye on him; two yellow-robed, insufferably impudent inquisitors strode in among his own attendants.

An escort of twenty prætorian guards and a decurion was waiting at the gate to take its place between the lictors and Marcia's litter, but that did not in any way increase Livius' sense of security. The prætorian guard regarded Marcia as the source of its illegal privileges. It looked to her far more than to the emperor for favors, buying them with lawless loyalty to her. She ruined discipline by her support of every plea for increased perquisites. No outraged citizen had any hope of redress so long as Marcia's ear could be reached (although Commodus got the blame for it). It was the key to Marcia's system of insurance against unforeseen contingencies. The only regularly drilled and armed troops in the city were as loyal to her, secretly and openly, as Livius himself was to the principle of cynical self-help.

He began to feel thoroughly frightened, as he told himself that the escort and their decurion would swear to any statement Marcia might make. If she had learned that he was in the habit of receiving secret information from her slave, there were a thousand ways she might take to avenge herself; a very simple way would be to charge him with improper overtures and have him killed by the prætorians—a way that might particularly interest her, since it would presumably increase her reputation for constancy to Commodus.

The eunuchs watched him. The lictors and prætorians cleared the way, so there were no convenient halts that could enable him to slip unnoticed through the crowd. His own attendants seemed to have divined that there was something ominous about the journey, and he was not the kind of man whose servants are devotedly attached to him. He knew it. He noticed sullenness already in the answers his servant gave him through the litter curtains, when he asked whether the man knew their destination.

"None knows. All I know is, we must follow Marcia."

The slave's voice was almost patronizing. Livius made up his mind, if he should live the day out, to sell the rascal to some farmer who would teach him with a whip what service meant. But he said nothing. He preferred to spring surprizes, only hoping he himself might not be overwhelmed in one.

By the time they reached Cornificia's house he was in such a state of nervousness, and so blanched, that he had to summon his servant into the litter to rub cosmetic on his cheeks. He took one of Galen's famous strychnine pills before he could prevent his limbs from trembling. Even so, when he rolled out of the litter and advanced with his courtliest bow to escort Marcia into the house, she recognized his fear and mocked him:

"You are bilious? Or has some handsomer Adonis won your Venus from you? Is it jealousy?"

He pretended that the litter-bearers needed whipping for having shaken him. It made him more than ever ill at ease that she should mock him before all the slaves who grouped themselves in Cornificia's forecourt. Hers was one of those houses set back from the street, combining an air of seclusion with such elegance as could not possibly escape the notice of the passer-by. The forecourt was adorned with statuary and the gate left wide, affording a glimpse of sunlit greenery and marble that entirely changed the aspect of the narrow street. There were never less than twenty tradesmen at the gate, imploring opportunity to show their wares, which were in baskets and boxes, with slaves squatting beside them. All Rome would know within the hour that Marcia had called on Cornificia, and that Livius, the subprefect, had been mocked by Marcia in public.

A small crowd gathered to watch the picturesque ceremony of reception—Cornificia's house steward marshaling his staff, the brightly colored costumes blending in the sunlight with the hues of flowers and the rich, soft sheen of marble in the shadow of tall cypresses. The prætorians had to form a cordon in front of the gate, and the street became choked by the impeded traffic. Rome loved pageantry; it filled its eyes before its belly, which was nine-tenths of the secret of the Cæsar's power.

Within the house, however, there was almost a stoical calm—a sensation of cloistered chastity produced by the restraint of ornament and the subdued light on gloriously painted frescoes representing evening benediction at a temple altar, a gathering of the Muses, sacrifice before a shrine of Æsculapius and Jason's voyage to Colchis for the Golden Fleece. The inner court, where Cornificia received her guests, was like a sanctuary dedicated to the decencies, its one extravagance the almost ostentatious restfulness, accentuated by the cooing of white pigeons and the drip and splash of water in the fountain in the midst.

The dignity of drama was the essence of all Roman ceremony. The formalities of greeting were observed as elegantly, and with far more evident sincerity, in Cornificia's house than in Cæsar's palace. Cornificia, dressed in white and wearing very little jewelry, received her guests more like an old-time patrician matron than a notorious modern concubine. Her notoriety, in fact, was due to Flavia Titiana, rather than to any indiscretions of her own. To justify her infidelities, which were a byword, Pertinax' lawful wife went to ingenious lengths to blacken Cornificia's reputation, regaling all society with her invented tales about the lewd attractions Cornificia staged to keep Pertinax held in her toils.

That Cornificia did exercise a sway over the governor of Rome was undeniable. He worshiped her and made no secret of it. But she held him by a method diametrically contrary to that which rumor, stirred by Flavia Titiana, indicated; Cornificia's house was a place where he could lay aside the feverish activities of public life and revel in the intellectual and philosophical amusements that he genuinely loved.

But Livius loathed her. Among other things, he suspected her of being in league with Marcia to protect the Christians. To him she represented the idealism that his cynicism bitterly rejected. The mere fact of her unshakable fidelity to Pertinax was an offense in his eyes; she presented what he considered an impudent pose of morality, more impudent because it was sustained. He might have liked her well enough if she had been a hypocrite, complaisant to himself.

She understood him perfectly—better, in fact, than she understood Marcia, whose visits usually led to intricate entanglements for Pertinax. When she had sent the slaves away and they four lay at ease on couches in the shade of three exotic potted palms, she turned her back toward Livius, suspecting he would bring his motives to the surface if she gave him time; whereas Marcia would hide hers and employ a dozen artifices to make them undiscoverable.

"YOU have not brought Livius because you think he loves me!" she said, laughing. "Nor have you come, my Marcia, for nothing, since you might have sent for me and saved yourself trouble. I anticipate intrigue! What plot have you discovered now? Is Pertinax its victim? You can always interest me if you talk of Pertinax."

"We will talk of Livius," said Marcia.

Leaning on his elbows, Livius glared at Caia Poppeia, Marcia's companion. He coughed, to draw attention to her, but Marcia refused to take the hint.

"Livius has information for us," she remarked.

Livius rose from the couch and came and stood before her, knitting his fingers together behind his back, compelling himself to smile. His pallor made the hastily applied cosmetics look ridiculous.

"Marcia," he said, "you make it obvious that you suspect me of some indiscretion."

"Never!" she retorted, mocking. "You indiscreet? Who would believe it? Give us an example of discretion; you are Paris in the presence of three goddesses. Select your destiny!"

He smiled, attempted to regain his normal air of tolerant importance—glanced about him—saw the sunlight making iridescent pools of fire within a crystal ball set on the fountain's edge—took up the ball and brought it to her, holding it in both hands.

"What choice is there than that which Paris made?" he asked, kneeling on one knee, laughing. "Venus rules men's hearts. She must prevail. So into your most lovely hands I give my destiny."

"You mean, you leave it there!" said Marcia. "Could you *ever* afford to ignore me and intrigue behind my back?"

"I am the least intriguing person of your acquaintance, Marcia," he answered, rising because the hard mosaic pavement hurt his knee, and the position made him feel undignified. But more than dignity he loved discretion; he wished there were eyes in the back of his head, to see whether slaves were watching from the curtained windows opening on the inner court. "It is my policy," he went on, "to know much and say little; to observe much, and do nothing! I am much too lazy for intrigue, which is hard work, judging by what I have seen of those who indulge in it."

"Is that why you sacrificed a white bull recently?" asked Marcia.

Livius glanced at Cornificia, but her patrician face gave no hint. Caia Poppeia's was less under control, for she was younger and had nothing to conceal; she was inquisitively enjoying the entertainment and evidently did not know what was coming. Livius wondered why Marcia trusted her.

"I sacrificed a white bull to Jupiter Capitolinus, as is customary, to confirm a sacred oath," he answered.

"Very well, suppose you break the oath!" said Marcia.

He managed to look scandalized—then chuckled foolishly, remembering what Pertinax had said about the value of an oath; but his own dignity obliged him to protest.

"I am not one of your Christians," he answered, stiffening himself. "I am old-fashioned enough to hold that an oath made at the altar of our Roman Jupiter is sacred and inviolable."

"When you took your oath of office you swore to be in all things true to Cæsar," Marcia retorted. "Do you prefer to tell Cæsar how true you have been to that oath? Which oath holds—the first one or the second?"

"I could ask to be released from the second one," said Livius. "If you will give me time—"

Marcia's laugh interrupted him. It was soft, melodious, like wavelets on a calm sea, hinting unseen reefs.

"Time," she said, "is all that death needs! Death does not wait on oaths; it comes to us. I wish to know just how far I can trust you, Livius."

Nine Roman nobles out of ten in Livius' position would have recognized at once the deadliness of the alternatives she offered and, preserving something of the shreds of pride, would have accepted suicide as preferable. Livius had no such stamina. He seized the other horn of the dilemma.

"I perceive Pertinax has betrayed me," he sneered, looking sharply at Cornificia; but she was watching Marcia and did not seem conscious of his glance. "If Pertinax has broken his oath, mine no longer binds me. This is the fact then: I discovered how he helped Sextus, son of Maximus, to avoid execution by a ruse, making believe to be killed. Pertinax was also privy to the execution of an unknown thief in place of Norbanus, a friend of Sextus, also implicated in conspiracy. Pertinax has been secretly negotiating with Sextus ever since. Sextus now calls himself Maternus and is notorious as a highwayman."

"What else do you know about Maternus?" Marcia inquired. There was a trace at last of sharpness in her voice. A hint conveyed itself that she could summon the prætorians if he did not answer swiftly.

"He plots against Cæsar."

"You know too little or too much!" said Marcia. "What else?"

He closed his lips tight. "I know nothing else."

"Have you had any dealings with Sextus?"

"Never."

He was shifting now from one foot to the other, hardly noticeably, but enough to make Marcia smile.

"Shall we hear what Sextus has to say to that?" asked Cornificia, so confidently that there was no doubt Marcia had given her the signal.

Marcia moved her melting, lazy, laughing eyes and Cornificia clapped her hands. A slave came.

"Bring the astrologer."

SEXTUS must have been listening, he appeared so instantly. He stood with folded arms confronting them, his weathered face in sunlight. Pigment was not needed to produce the healthy bronze hue of his skin; his curly hair, bound by a fillet, was unruly from the outdoor life he had been leading; the strong sinews of his arms and legs belied the ease of his pretended calling and the starry cloak he wore was laughable in its failure to disguise the man of action. He saluted the three women with a gesture of the raised right hand that no man unaccustomed to the use of arms could imitate, then turning slightly toward Livius, acknowledged his nod with a humorous grin.

"So we meet again, Bultius Livius."

"Again?" asked Marcia.

"Why yes, I met him in the house of Pertinax. It is three days since we spoke together. Three, or is it four, Livius? I have been busy. I forget."

"Can Livius have lied?" asked Marcia. She seemed to be enjoying the entertainment.

Livius threw caution to the winds.

"Is this a tribunal?" he demanded. "If so, of what am I accused?" He tried to speak indignantly, but something caught in his throat. The cough became a sob and in a moment he was half-hysterical. "By Hercules, what judges! What a witness! Is he a two-headed witness who shall swear my life away?* I understand you, Marcia!"

"*You?*" she laughed. "*You* understand *me?*"

He recovered something of his self-possession, a wave of virility returning.

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*At least two witnesses were necessary under Roman law.

High living and the feverish excitement of the palace regime had ruined his nerves but there were traces still of his original astuteness. He resumed his air of dignity.

"Pardon me," he said. "I have been overworked of late. I must see Galen about this jumpiness. When I said I understand you I meant, I realize that you are joking. Naturally you would not receive a highwayman in Cornificia's house, and at the same time accuse *me* of treason! Pray excuse my outburst—set it to the score of ill-health. I will see Galen."

"You shall see him now!" laughed Marcia, and Cornificia clapped her hands.

Less suddenly than Sextus had appeared, because his age was beginning to tell on him, Galen entered the court through a door behind the palm-trees and stood smiling, making his old-world, slow salute to Marcia. His bright eyes moved alertly amid wrinkles. He looked something like the statues of the elder Cato, only with a kindlier humor and less obstinacy at the corners of the mouth. Two slaves brought out a couch for him and vanished when he had taken his ease on it after fussing a little because the sun was in his eyes.

"My trade is to oppose death diplomatically," he remarked. "I am a poor diplomatist. I only gain a little here and there. Death wins inevitably. Nevertheless, they only summon me for consultation when they hope to gain a year or two for somebody. Marcia, unless you let Bultius Livius use that couch he will swoon. I warn you. The man's heart is weak. He has more brain than heart," he added. "How is our astrologer?"

He greeted Sextus with a wrinkled grin and beckoned him to share his couch. Sextus sat down and began chafing the old doctor's legs. Marcia took her time about letting Livius be seated.

"You heard Galen?" she asked. "We are here to cheat death diplomatically."

"Whose death?" Livius demanded.

"Rome's!" said Marcia, her eyes intently on his face. "If Rome should split in three parts it would fall asunder. None but Commodus can save us from a civil war. We are here to learn what Bultius Livius can do to preserve the life of Commodus."

Livius' face, grotesque already with its hastily smeared carmine, assumed new bewilderment.

"I have seen men tortured who were less ready to betray themselves," said Galen. "Give him wine—strong wine, that is my advice."

But Marcia preferred her victim thoroughly subjected.

"Fill your eyes with sunlight, Livius. Breathe deep! You look and breathe your last, unless you satisfy me! This astrologer, *who is not Sextus*—mark that! I have said he is not Sextus. Galen certified to Sextus' death and there were twenty other witnesses. Nor is he Maternus the highwayman. Maternus was crucified. That other Maternus, who is rumored to live in the Aventine Hills, is an imaginary person—a mere name used by runaways who take to robbery. This astrologer, I say, reports that you know all the secrets of the factions that are separately plotting to destroy our Commodus."

Livius did not answer, although she paused to give him time.

"You said you understood me, Livius. But it is I who understand you—utterly! To you any price is satisfactory if your own skin and perquisites are safe. You are as crafty a spy as any rat in the palace cellars. You have kept yourself informed in order to get the pickings when you see at last which side to take. Careful, very clever of you, Livius! But have you ever seen an eagle rob a fish-hawk of its catch?"

"Why waste time?" Cornificia asked impatiently. "He forced himself on Pertinax, who should have had him murdered, only Pertinax is too indifferent to his own—"

"Too philosophical!" corrected Galen.

Then Caia Poppeia spoke up, in a young, hard voice that had none of Marcia's honeyed charm. No doubt of her was possible; she could be cruel for the sake of cruelty and loyal for the sake of pride. Her beauty was a mere means to an end—the end intrigue, for the impassionate excitement of it. She was straight-lipped, with a smile that flickered, and a hard light in her blue eyes.

"It was I who learned you spy on Marcia. I know, too, that you keep a spy in Britain, one in Gaul, another in Severus' camp. I read the last nine letters they sent you. I showed them to Marcia."

"I kept one," Marcia added. "It came yesterday. It compromises you beyond—"

"I yield!" said Livius, his knees beginning to look weak.

"To whom? To me?" asked Sextus,

standing up abruptly and confronting him with folded arms. "Who stole the list I sent to Pertinax, of names of the important men who are intriguing for Severus, and for Pescennius Niger, and for Clodius Albinus?"

"Who knows?" Livius shrugged his shoulders.

"None knew of that list but you!" said Sextus. "You heard me speak of it to Pertinax. You heard me promise I would send it to him. None but you and he and I knew who the messenger would be. Where is the messenger?"

"In the sewers probably!" said Marcia. "The list is more important."

"If it isn't in the sewers, too," said Livius, snatching at a straw. "By Hercules, I know nothing of a list."

"Then you shall drown with Sextus' slave in the Cloaca Maxima,"* said Marcia. "Not that I need the list. I know what names are written on it. But if it should have fallen into Cæsar's hands—"

She shuddered, acting horror perfectly, and Livius, like a drowning man who thinks he sees the shore, struck out and sank!

"You threaten me, but I am no such fool as you imagine! I know all about you! I perceive you have crossed your Rubicon. Well—"

"Summon the decurion and two men!" Marcia interrupted, glancing at Cornificia. But she made a gesture with her hand that Cornificia interpreted to mean "do nothing of the kind!"

Livius did not see the gesture. Rage, shame, terror overwhelmed him and he blurted out the information Marcia was seeking—hurled it at her in the form of silly, useless threats:

"You wanton! You can kill me but my journal is in safe hands! Harm me—cause me to be missing from the palace for a few hours, and they may light your funeral fires! My journal, with the names of the conspirators, and all the details of your daily intriguing, goes straight into Cæsar's hands!"

The climax he expected failed. There was no excitement. Nobody seemed astonished. Marcia settled herself more comfortably on the couch and Galen began whispering to Sextus. The two other women looked amused. Reaction sweeping over him, his senses reeled and Livius stepped backward, staggering to the fountain, where he sat down.

"*Bona dea!* But the man took time to tell his secret!" Marcia exclaimed. "Poppeia, you had better take my litter to the palace and bring that minx Cornelia. I suspected it was she but wasn't sure of it. Don't give her an inkling of what you know. Go with her to her apartment and watch her dress; then make an excuse to keep her waiting in your room while you go back and search hers. Have help if you need it; take two of my eunuchs, but watch that they don't read the journal. Look under her mattress. Look everywhere. If you can't find the journal, bring Cornelia without it. I will soon make her tell us where it is."

CHAPTER VIII

NARCISSUS.

"A GLADIATOR'S life is not so bad if he behaves himself, and while it lasts," Narcissus said.

He was sitting beside Sextus, son of Maximus, in the *ergastulum* beneath the training school of Bruttius Marius, which was well known to be the emperor's establishment, although maintained in the name of a citizen. There was a stone seat at the end where sunlight poured through a barred window high up in the wall. To right and left facing a central corridor were cells with doors of latticed iron. Each cell had its own barred window, hardly a foot square, set high out of reach and the light, piercing the latticed doors, made criss-cross patterns on the white wall of the corridor. Narcissus got up, glanced into each cell and sat down again beside Sextus.

"The trouble is, they don't," he went on. "If you let them out, they drink and get into poor condition; and if you keep them in, they kill themselves unless they're watched. These men are reserved for Paulus, and they know they haven't a chance against him."

"Paulus' luck won't last forever," Sextus remarked grimly.

"No, nor his skill, I suppose. But he doesn't debauch himself, so he's always in perfect condition."

"Haven't you a man in here who might be made nervy enough to kill him?" Sextus asked. "They would kill the man himself, of course, directly afterward, but we might undertake to enrich his relatives."

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*The great sewer of Rome.

Narcissus shook his head.

"One might have a chance with the sword or with the net and trident, though I doubt it. But Paulus uses a javelin and his aim is like lightning. Only yesterday at practise they loosed eleven lions at him from eleven directions at the same moment. He slew them with eleven javelins, and each one stone dead. Some of these men saw him do it, which hasn't encouraged them, I can tell you. In the second place, they know Paulus is Commodus. He might just as well go into the arena frankly as the emperor, for all the secret it is. That substitute who occupies the royal pavilion when Commodus himself is in the arena no longer looks very much like him; he is getting too loose under the chin, although a year ago you could hardly tell the two apart. Even the mob knows Paulus is Commodus, although nobody dares to acclaim him openly. Send a gladiator in against another gladiator and even though he may know that the other man can split a stick at twenty yards, he will do his best. But let him know he goes against the emperor and he has no nerve to start with; he can't aim straight; he suspects his own three javelins and his shield and helmet have been tampered with. I myself would be afraid to face Paulus, being not much good with the javelin in any case, besides being superstitious about killing emperors, who are gods, not men, or the senate and priests wouldn't say so. It is the same in the races: setting aside Cæsar's skill, which is simply phenomenal, the other charioteers are all afraid of him."

"If he isn't killed soon, Severus or one of the others will forestall us all," said Sextus. "Pertinax has only one chance: to be on the throne before the other candidates know what is happening."

Narcissus' bronze face lighted with a sudden smile that rippled all around the corners of his mouth, so that he looked like a genial satyr.

"Speaking of killing," he said, "Marcia has ordered me to kill you the moment you make up your mind the time has come to strike!"

"You promised her, of course?"

"No, as it happens we were interrupted. But she relies on me and if she ever begins to suspect me I would rather die in the arena than be racked and burned!"

"Why not then? How is this for a proposal?" Sextus touched him on the shoulder. "Substitute yourself and me for two of these men! Send me in against him first. If he kills me, you next. One of us might get him. I am lucky. I believe the gods are interested in me, I have had so many escapes from death."

"I haven't much faith in the gods," said Narcissus. "They may be all like Commodus. I heard Galen say that men created gods in their own image."

Sextus smiled at him.

"You have been listening, I suppose, to Marcia and her Christians."

"Listening, yes, but I don't lean either way. It doesn't seem to me that Christianity can do much for a man when javelins are in the air. And besides, to be frank with you, Sextus, I rather hope to make a little something for myself. God though he is said to be, I would like to see Commodus killed for I loathe him. But I hope to survive him and obtain my freedom. Pertinax would manumit me. That is why I applied for the post of trainer in this beastly *ergastulum*. It is bad enough to have to endure the gloom of men virtually condemned to death and looking for a chance to kill themselves, but it is better than treading the sand to have one's liver split, one's throat cut, and be dragged out with the hooks. I have fought many a fight, but I liked each one less than the last."

He got up and strode again along the corridor, glancing into the cells, where gladiators sat fettered to the wall.

"This whole business is getting too confused for me," he grumbled, sitting down again. "You want to kill Commodus, as is reasonable. Marcia has ordered me to kill you, which is unreasonable! Yet for the present she protects you. Why? She knows you are Commodus' enemy. She seems anxious to save Commodus. Yet she encourages Pertinax, who doesn't want to be emperor; he only dallies with the thought because Marcia helps Cornificia to persuade him! Isn't that a confusion for you? And now there's Bultius Livius. As I understand it, Marcia caught him spying on her. No woman in her senses would trust Livius; the man has snow-broth in his veins and slow fire in his head. Yet Marcia now heaps favors on him!"

"That is my doing," said Sextus.

"Are you mad then, too?"

"Maybe! I have persuaded Marcia that, now she has possession of the journal Livius was keeping, she can henceforth hold that over him and use him to advantage. She can win his gratitude—"

"He has none!"

"—and at the same time hold over him the threat of exposure for connection with the Severus faction, and the Pescennius faction, and the Clodius Albinus faction. He had it all down in his journal. He can easily be involved in those conspiracies if Marcia isn't satisfied with his spying in her behalf."

"*Gemini!* The man will break down under the strain. He has no stamina. He will denounce us all."

"Let us hope so," Sextus answered. "I am counting on it. Nothing but sudden danger will ever bring Pertinax up to the mark! I gave a bond to Marcia for Livius' life."

"Jupiter! What kind of bond? And what has come over Marcia that she accepted it?"

"I guaranteed to her that I will not denounce herself to Commodus! She saw the point. She could never clear herself."

"But how could you denounce her? She can have you seized and silenced any time! Weren't you in Cornificia's house, with the guard at the gate? Why didn't she summon the prætorians and hand you over to them?"

"Because Galen was there, too. She loves him, trusts him, and Galen is my friend. Besides, Pertinax would turn on her if she should have me killed. Pertinax was my father's friend, and is mine. Marcia's only chance, if Commodus should lose his life, is for Pertinax to seize the throne and continue to be her friend and protect her. Any other possible successor to Commodus would have her head off in the same hour."

"Well, Sextus, that argument won't keep her from having you murdered. I am only hoping she won't order me to do it, because the cat will be out of the bag then. I will not refuse, but I will certainly not kill you, and that will mean—"

"You forget Norbanus and my freedmen," Sextus interrupted. "She knows very well that they know all my secrets. They would avenge me instantly by sending Commodus full information of the plot, involving Marcia head over heels. She is ready to betray Commodus if that should seem the safest course. If she is capable of treachery to him, she is equally sure to betray all her friends if she thought her own life were in danger!"

"Now listen, Sextus, and don't speak too loud or they'll hear you in the cells; any of these poor devils would jump at a chance to save his own skin by betraying you and me. Talk softly. I say, listen! There isn't any safety anywhere with all these factions plotting each against the other, none knowing which will strike first and Commodus likely to pounce on all of them at any minute. I don't know why he hasn't heard of it already."

"He is too busy training his body to have time to use his brain," said Sextus. "However, go on."

"I think Commodus is quite likely to have the best of it!" Narcissus said, screwing up his eyes as if he gazed at an antagonist across the dazzling sand of the arena. "Somebody—some spy—is sure to inform him. There will be wholesale proscriptions. Commodus will try to scare Severus, Niger and Albinus by slaughtering their supporters here in Rome. I can see what is coming."

"Are you, too, a god—like Commodus—that you can see so shrewdly?"

"Never mind. I can see. And I can see a better way for you, and for me also. You have made yourself a great name as Maternus, less, possibly, in Rome than on the countryside. You have more to begin with than ever Spartacus had—"

"Aye, and less, too," Sextus interrupted. "For I lack his confidence that Rome can be brought to her knees by an army of slaves. I lack his willingness to try to do it. Rome must be saved by honorable Romans, who have Rome at heart and not their own personal ambition. No army of runaway slaves can ever do it. Nothing offends me more than that Commodus makes slaves his ministers, and I mean by that no offense to you, Narcissus, who are fit to rank with Spartacus himself. But I am a republican. It is not vengeance that I seek. I will reckon I have lived if I have ridded Rome of Commodus and helped to replace him with a man who will restore our ancient liberties."

"Liberties?" Narcissus wore his satyr-smile again. "It makes small difference to slaves and gladiators how much liberty the free men have! The more for them, the less for us! Let us live while the living is good, Sextus! Let us take to the mountains and help ourselves to what we need while Pertinax and all these others fight for too much! Let them have their too much and grow sick of it! What do you and I need beyond clothing, a weapon, armor, a girl or two and a safe place for retreat? I have heard Sardinia is wonderful. But if you still think you would rather haunt your old estates, where you know the people and they know you, so that you will be warned of any attempt to catch you, that will be all right with me. We can swoop down on the inns along the main roads now and then, rob whom it is convenient to rob, and live like noblemen!"

"Three years I have lived an outlaw's life," Sextus answered, "sneaking into Rome to borrow money from my father's friends to save me the necessity of stealing. It is one thing to pretend to be a robber, and another thing to rob. The robber's name makes nine men out of ten your secret well-wishers; the deed makes you all men's enemy. How do you suppose I have escaped capture? It was simple enough. Every robber in Italy has called himself Maternus, so that I have seemed to be here, there, everywhere, aye, and often in three or four places at once! I have been caught and killed at least a dozen times! But all the while my men and I were safe because we took care to harm nobody. We let others do the murdering and robbing. We have lived like hermits, showing ourselves only often enough to keep alive the Maternus legend."

"Well, isn't that better than risking your neck trying to make and unmake emperors?" Narcissus asked.

"I risk my neck each hour I linger in Rome!"

"Well then, by Hercules, take payment for the risk, and cut the risk and vanish!" exclaimed Narcissus. "Help yourself once and for all to a bag full of gold in exchange for your father's estates that were confiscated when they cut his head off. Then leave Italy, and let us be outlaws in Sardinia."

Sextus laughed.

"That probably sounds glorious to one in your position. I, too, rather enjoyed the prospect when I first made my escape from Antioch and discovered how easy the life was. But though I owe it to my father's memory to win back his estates, even that, and present outlawry is nothing compared to the zeal I have for restoring Rome's ancient liberties. But I don't deceive myself; I am not the man who can accomplish that; I can only help the one who can, and will. That one is Pertinax. He will reverse the process that has been going on since Julius Cæsar overthrew the old republic. He will use a Cæsar's power to destroy the edifice of Cæsar and rebuild what Cæsar wrecked!"

Narcissus pondered that, his head between his hands.

"I haven't Rome at heart," he said at last. "Why should I have? There are girls, whom I have forgotten, whom I loved more than I love Rome. I am a slave—a gladiator. I have been applauded by the crowds, but I know what that means, having seen other men go the same route. I am an emperor's favorite, and I know what that means too; I saw Cleander die; I have seen man after man, and woman after woman lose his favor suddenly. Banishment, death, the *ergastulum*, torture—and, what is much worse, the insults the brute heaps on any one he turns against—I am too wise to give *that*—" he spat on the flag-stones—"for the friendship of Commodus. And Commodus is Rome; you can't persuade me he isn't. Rome turns on its favorites as he does—scorns them, insults them, throws them on dung-heaps. *That* for Rome!" He spat again. "They even break the noses off the statues of the men they used to idolize! They even throw the statues on a dung-heap to insult the dead! Why should I set Rome above my own convenience?"

"Well, for instance, you could almost certainly buy your freedom by betraying me," said Sextus. "Why don't you?"

"Jupiter! How shall a man answer that? I suppose I don't betray you because if I did I should loathe myself. And I prefer to like myself, which I contrive to do at intervals. Also, I enjoy the company of honest men, and I think you are honest, although I think you are also an idealist—which, I take it, is the same thing as a born fool, or so I have begun to think, since I attend on the emperor and have to hear so much talk of philosophy. Look you what philosophy has made of Commodus! Didn't

Marcus Aurelius beget him from his own loins, and wasn't Marcus Aurelius the greatest of all philosophers? Didn't he surround young Commodus with all the learned idealists he could find? That is what I am told he did. And look at Commodus! Our Roman Commodus! God Commodus! I haven't murdered him because I am afraid, and because I don't see how I could gain by it. I don't betray you because I would despise myself if I did."

"I would despise myself if I should be untrue to Rome," Sextus answered after a moment. "Commodus is not Rome. Neither is the mob Rome."

"What is then?" Narcissus asked. "The bricks and mortar? The marble that the slaves must haul under the lash? The ponds where they feed their lampreys on dead gladiators? The arena where a man salutes a dummy emperor before a disguised one kills him? The senate, where they buy and sell the consulates and prætorships and quæstorships? The tribunals where justice goes by privilege? The temples where as many gods as there are, Romans yell for sacrifices to enrich the priests? The farms where the slave-gangs labor like poor old Sisyphus and are sold off in their old age to the contractors who clear the latrines, or to the galleys, or, if they're lucky, to the lime-kilns where they dry up like sticks and die soon? There is a woman in a side-street near the fish-market, who is very rich and looks like Rome to me. She has so many gold rings on her fingers that you can't see the dirt underneath; and she owns so many brothels and wine-shops that she can even buy off the tax-collectors. Do I love her? Do I love Rome? No! I love you, Sextus, son of Maximus, and I will go with you to the world's end if you will lead the way."

"I love Rome," Sextus answered. "Possibly I want to see her liberties restored because I love my own liberty and can't imagine myself honorable unless Rome herself is honored first. When you and I are sick we need a Galen. Rome needs Pertinax. You ask me what is Rome? She is the cradle of my manhood."

"A befouled nest!" said Narcissus.

"An Augean stable with a Hercules who doesn't do his work, I grant you! But we can substitute another Hercules."

"Pertinax is too old," Narcissus objected, weakening, a trifle sulkily.

"He is old enough to wish to die in honor rather than dishonor. You and I, Narcissus, have no honor—you a slave and I an outlaw. Let us win, then, honor for ourselves by helping to heal Rome of her dishonor!"

"Oh well, have it your own way," said Narcissus, unconvinced. "A brass *as* for your honor! The alternative is death or liberty in either case, and as for me, I prefer friendship to religion, so I will follow you, whichever road you take. Now go. These fellows mustn't recognize you. It is time to take them one by one into the exercising yard. I daren't take more than one at a time or they'd kill me even with the blunted practise-weapons. I wish they might face Commodus as boldly as they tackle me! I am a weary man, and many times a bruised one, I can tell you, when the night comes, after putting twenty of them through their paces."

CHAPTER IX

STEWED EELS.

THE training arena where Commodus worked off energy and kept his Herculean muscles in condition was within the palace grounds, but the tunnel by which he reached it continued on and downward to the Circus Maximus, so that he could attend the public spectacles without much danger of assassination.

Nevertheless, a certain danger still existed. One of his worst frenzies of proscription had been started by a man who waited for him in the tunnel, and lost his nerve and then, instead of killing him, pretended to deliver an insulting message from the senate. Since that time the tunnel had been lined with guards at regular intervals, and when Commodus passed through his mysterious "double" was obliged to walk in front of him surrounded by enough attendants to make any one not in the secret believe the double was the emperor himself.

No man in the known world was less incapable than Commodus of self-defense against an armed man. There was no deception about his feats of strength and skill; he was undoubtedly the most terrific fighter and consummate athlete Rome had ever seen, and he was as proud of it as Nero once was of his "golden voice." But, as he explained to the fawning courtiers who shouldered one another for a place beside him as he hurried down the tunnel:

"How could Rome replace me? Yesterday I had to order a slave beaten to death for breaking a vase of Greek glass. I can buy a hundred slaves for half what that glass cost Hadrian. And I could have a thousand better senators tomorrow than the fools who belch and stammer in the *curia.** But where would you find another Commodus if some lurking miscreant should stab me from behind? It was the geese that saved the capitol. You cacklers can preserve your Commodus."

They agreed in chorus, it would be Rome's irreparable loss if he should die, and certain senators, more fertile than the others in expedients for drawing his attention to themselves, paused ostentatiously to hold a little conversation with the guards and promise them rewards if they should catch a miscreant lurking in wait to attack "our beloved, our glorious emperor."

Commodus overheard them, as they meant he should.

"And such fulsome idiots as those expect me to believe they can frame laws!" He scowled over-shoulder. "Write down their names for me, somebody. The senate needs pruning! I will purge it the way Galen used to purge me when I had the colic! Dioscuri! But these leaky babblers suffocate me!"

He was true to the Cæsarian tradition. He believed himself a god. He more than half-persuaded other men. His almost superhuman energy and skill with weapons, his terrific storms of anger and his magnetism overawed courtiers and politicians as they did the gladiators whom he slew in the arena. The strain of madness in his blood provided cunning that could mask itself beneath a princely bluster of indifference to consequences. He could fear with an extravagance coequal to the fury of his love of danger, and his fear struck terror into men's hearts, as it stirred his mad brain into frenzies.

He made no false claim when he called Rome the City of Commodus and himself the Roman Hercules. The vast majority of Romans were unfit to challenge his contempt of them, and his contempt was never under cover for a moment.

Debauchery, of wine and women, entered not at all into his private life although, in public, he encouraged it in others for the simple reason that it weakened men who otherwise might turn on him. He was never guilty of excesses that might undermine his strength or shake his nerves; there was an almost superhuman purity about his worship of athletic powers. He outdid the Greeks in that respect. But he allowed the legend of his monstrous orgies in the palace to gain currency, partly because that encouraged the Romans to debauch themselves and render themselves incapable of overthrowing him, and partly because it helped to cover up his trick of employing a substitute to occupy the royal pavilion at the games when he himself drove chariots in the races or fought in the arena as the gladiator Paulus.

Men who had let wine and women ruin their own nerves knew it was impossible that any one, who lived as Commodus was said to do, could drive a chariot and wield a javelin as Paulus did. Whoever faced a Roman gladiator under the critical gaze of a crowd that knew all the points of fighting and could instantly detect, and did instantly resent pretense, fraud, trickery, the poor condition of one combatant or the unwillingness of one man to have at another in deadly earnest, had to be not only in the pink of bodily condition but a fighter such as no drunken sensualist could ever hope to be. So it was easy to suppress the scandal that the gladiator Paulus was the emperor himself, although half Rome half-believed it; and the substitute who occupied the seat of honor at the games—ageing a little, growing a little pouchy under eyes and chin—was pointed to as proof that Commodus was being ruined by the life he led.

The trick of making use of the same substitute to save the emperor the boredom of official ceremony, whenever there was no risk of the public coming close enough to detect the fraud, materially helped to strengthen the officially fostered argument that Commodus could not be Paulus.

So the mystery of the identity of Paulus was like all court secrets and most secrets of intriguing governments, no mystery at all to hundreds, but to thousands an insoluble conundrum. The official propagandists of the court news, absolutely in control of all the channels through which facts could reach the public, easily offset the constant leakage from the lips of slaves and gladiators by disseminating artfully concocted news. Those actually in the secret, flattered by the confidence and fearful for their own skins, steadfastly denied the story when it cropped up. Last, but not least, was the law, that made it sacrilege to speak in terms derogatory to the emperor. A gladiator, though the crowd might almost deify him, was a casteless individual, unprivileged before the law, whom any franchised citizen would rate as socially far beneath himself. To have identified the emperor with Paulus in a voice above a whisper would have made the culprit liable to death and confiscation of his goods.

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* The senate house.

The substitute himself, a man of mystery, was kept in virtual imprisonment. He was known as "Pavonius Nasor," not because that was his real name, which was known to very few people, but because of an old legend that the ghost of a certain Pavonius Nasor, murdered centuries ago and never buried, still walked in the neighborhood of that part of the palace where the emperor's substitute now led his mysterious, secret existence.

There were plenty of whispered stories current as to his true identity. Some said he was an impoverished landholder whom Commodus had met by accident when traveling in Northern Italy. But it was much more commonly believed he was the emperor's twin brother, spirited away at birth by midwives, and the stories told to account for that were as remarkably unlikely as the tale itself; as for instance, that a soothsayer had prophesied how Commodus should one day mount the throne and that he and his twin brother would wreck Rome in civil war—a warning hardly likely to have had much weight with the father, Marcus Aurelius, although the mother was more likely to have given credence to it.

Whatever the truth of his origin, Pavonius Nasor never ran the risk of telling it. He kept his sinecure by mastering his tongue, preserving almost bovine speechlessness. When he and Commodus met face to face he never seemed to see the joke of the resemblance, never laughed at Commodus' obscenely vivid jibes at his expense, nor once complained of his anomalous position. He appeared to be a man of no ambition other than to get through life as easily as might be—of no personal dignity, no ruling habits, but possessed of imitative talent that enabled him, without the slightest trouble, to adopt the very gait and gesture of the emperor whom he impersonated.

AS HE strode ahead along the tunnel he received the guards' salute with merely enough nod of recognition to deceive an onlooker not in the secret. (It was Pavonius Nasor's half-indulgent, rather lazy smile that had persuaded Rome and even the prætorian guards that Commodus was an easy-going, sensual, good humored man.)

There was a box at one end of the private arena, over the gate where the horses entered, so placed as to avoid the sun's direct rays. It was reached by a short stairway from an anteroom that opened on the tunnel. There was no other means of access to the box. It's wooden sidewalls, finished to resemble gilded eagle's wings, projected over the arena so that it was well screened and in shadow. There was none, observing from below, who could have sworn it had not been the emperor himself who sat in the box and watched Paulus the gladiator showing off his skill.

The assembled gladiators, perfectly aware of Paulus' true identity, went through the farce of solemnly saluting as the emperor the man who stared down at them from beneath an awning's shadow between golden eagle's wings, and who returned the salute with a wave of the arm that all Rome could have recognized.

Commodus, nearly as naked as when he was born, came running from a dressing room and pranced and leaped over the sand to bring the sweat-beads to his skin; then, snatching at the nearest gladiator, wrestled with him until the breathless victim cried for mercy; dropped him then, as crushed as if a python had left a job half-finished, and shouted for the ashen sword-sticks. In a minute, with a leather buckler on his left arm, he was parrying the thrusts and blows of six men, driving and so crowding them on one another's toes that only two could seriously answer the terrific flailing of his own ash stick. He named them, named his blow, and laid them one by one, half-stunned and bleeding on the sand, until the last one by a quick feint landed on him, raising a great crimson welt across his shoulders.

"Well done!" Commodus exclaimed and smote him on the skull so fiercely that he broke the sword-stick.

"You have killed him," said a senator as two men promptly seized the victim's arms to drag him out.

"Possibly," said Commodus. "That blow I landed on him would have killed a horse. But he is fortunate. He dies proud—prouder than you ever will, Varronius! He got past Paulus' guard! Would you like to attempt it? Woman! How I loathe you soft, effeminate, sleek senators! You fear death and you fear life equally! Where is Narcissus? Where are those men who are to try to kill me at my birthday games?"

There was no answer from Narcissus. Commodus forgot him in a moment, called for javelins and hurled them at a target, then at half-a-dozen targets, hitting all six marks exactly in the middle as he spun himself on one heel.

"I am in fettle!" he exclaimed, clapping the back of the senator whom he had scurrilously insulted a moment ago. If he was conscious of applause from the group of courtiers and gladiators he gave no sign of it. What pleased him was his own ability, not their praises.

"Lions!" he said. "Loose that big one!"

"Paulus," a scarred veteran answered (they were all forbidden to address him by any other name in that arena), "you have ordered us to keep that fellow for the birthday games. If you keep killing all the best ones off at practise, what shall we do when the day comes? The last ship-load has arrived from Africa and already you have used up nearly half of them. There is no chance of another cargo arriving in time for the games. And besides, we have lacked corpses recently; that big one hasn't tasted man's flesh. He is hungry now. He will eat whatever we throw in, so let him taste the right meat that will make him savage."

"Loose a leopard then."

The veteran went off without a word to give his orders to the men below-ground, whose duty it was to drag the cages to the openings of tunnels in the masonry through which the animals emerged into the sunlight. There were ten such openings on either side of the arena, closed by trapdoors, set in grooves, that could be raised by ropes from overhead.

Commodus picked up one javelin and poised it. Half-a-dozen gladiators watched him, paying no attention to the doors, through any one of which the animal might come. They knew their Paulus, and were trained, besides, to look at death or danger with a curious, contemptuous calm. But the courtiers were nervous, grouping themselves where the sunlight threw a V-shaped shadow on the sand, as if they thought that semi-twilight would protect them.

A wooden door rose squeaking in its grooves but Commodus kept his back toward it.

"Women!" he exclaimed.

His sudden scowl transformed his handsome face into a thing of horror. He began to mutter savagely obscene abuse. A leopard crept into the sunlight, tried to turn again but was prevented by the closing trap, and crouched against the arena wall.

"Beware! The beast comes!" said a gladiator.

"Hold your presumptuous tongue, you slave-born rascal!" Commodus retorted. "Take that yapping dog away and have him whipped!"

A man stepped from the entrance gate to beckon the offending gladiator, who walked out with a look of hatred on his face. He paused once, hesitating whether to ask mercy, and thought better of it, shrugging his fine bronzed shoulders. The leopard left the wall and crept toward the center of the sand, his black and yellow beauty rippling in the sunlight and his shadow looking like death's trailing cloak. The courtiers seemed doubtful which of the two beasts to watch, leopard or emperor.

"A spear!" said Commodus.

A gladiator put it in his hand.

"Varronius! It irks me to have cowards in the senate! Let me see you try to kill that leopard!"

Decadent and grown effeminate though Rome was, there was no patrician who had not received some training in the use of arms. Varronius took the spear at once, his white hands closing on the shaft with military firmness. But his white face gave the lie to the alacrity with which he strode out of the shadow.

"Kill him, and you shall have the consulate next year!" said Commodus. "Be killed, and there will be one useless bastard less to clutter up the *curia!*"

A flush of anger swept over the senator's pale face. For a moment he looked almost capable of lunging with the spear at Commodus—but Commodus was toying with the javelin. Varronius strode out to face the leopard, and the lithe beast did not wait to feel the spear-point.

It began to stalk its adversary in irregular swift curves. Its body almost pressed the sand. Its eyes were spots of sunlit topaz. Commodus' frown vanished. He began to gloat over the leopard's subtlety and strength.

"He is a lovelier thing than you, Varronius! He is a better fighter! He is manlier! He is worth more! He has kept his body stronger and his wits more nimble! He will get you! By the Dioscuri, he will get you! I will bet a talent that he gets you—and I hope he does! You hold your spear the way a woman holds a distaff—but observe the way he gathers all his strength in readiness to leap instantly in any direction! Ah!"

The leopard made a feint, perhaps to test the swiftness of the spear-point. Leaping like a flash of light, he seemed to change direction in mid-air, the point missing him by half a hand's breadth. One terrific claw, outreaching as he turned, ripped open Varronius' tunic and brought a little stream of crimson trickling down his left arm.

"Good!" Commodus remarked. "First blood to the braver! Who would like to bet with me?"

"I!" Varronius retorted from between set teeth, his eyes fixed on the leopard that had recommenced his swift strategic to-and-fro stalking movement.

"I have betted you the consulship already. Who else wants to bet?" asked Commodus.

Before any one could answer the leopard sprang in again at Varronius, who stepped aside and drove his spear with very well timed accuracy. Only force enough was lacking. The point slit the leopard's skin and made a stinging wound along the beast's ribs, turning him the way a spur-prick turns a horse. His snarl made Varronius step back another pace or two, neglecting his chance to attack and drive the spear-point home. The infuriated leopard watched him for a moment, ears back, tail spasmodically twitching, then shot to one side and charged straight at the group of courtiers.

They scattered. They were almost unarmed. There were three of them who stumbled, interfering with each other. The nearest to the leopard drew a dagger with a jeweled hilt, a mere toy with a light blade hardly longer than his hand. He threw his toga over his left forearm and stood firm to make a fight for it, his white face rigid and his eyes ablaze. The leopard leaped—and fell dead, hardly writhing. Commodus' long javelin had caught him in the middle of his spring, exactly at the point behind the shoulder-bone that leaves a clear course to the heart.

"I would not have done that for a coward, Tullius! If you had run I would have let him kill you!"

Commodus strode up and pulled out the javelin, setting one foot on the leopard and exerting all his strength.

"Look here, Varronius. Do you see how deep my blade went? Pin-pricks are no use against man or animal. Kill when you strike, like great Jove with his thunderbolts! Life isn't a game between Maltese kittens; it's a spectacle in which the strong devour the weak and all the gods look on! Loose another leopard there! I'll show you!'

He took the spear from Varronius, balanced it a moment, discarded it and chose another, feeling its point with his thumb. There was a squeak of pulleys as they loosed a leopard near the end of the arena. He charged the animal, leaping from foot to foot. He made prodigious leaps; there was no guessing which way he would jump next. He was not like a human being. The leopard, snarling, slunk away, attempting to avoid him, but he crowded it against the wall. He forced it to turn at bay. No eye was quick enough to see exactly how he killed it, save that he struck when the leopard sprang. The next that anybody actually saw, he had the writhing creature on the spear, in air, like a legion's standard.

Then the madness surged into his brain.

"So I rule Rome!" he exclaimed, and threw the leopard at the gladiators' feet. "Because I pity Rome that could not find another Paulus! I strike first, before they strike me!"

They flattered him—fawned on him, but he was much too genuinely mad for flattery to take effect.

"If you were worth a barrelful of rats I'd have a senate that might save me trouble! Then like Tiberius I might remain away from Rome and live more like a god. I've more than half a mind to let my dummy stay here to amuse you wastrels!" He glanced up at the box, where his substitute lolled and yawned and smiled. "All you degenerates need is some one you can rub yourselves against like fat cats mewing for a bowl of milk! By Hercules, now I'll show you something that will make your blood leap. Bring out the new Spanish team."

With an imperious gesture he sent senators and gladiators to scatter themselves all over the arena. Not yet satisfied, he ordered all the guards fetched from the tunnel and arranged them in a similar disorder, so that finally no stretch of fifty yards was left without a man obstructing it. There was no spina down the midst, nor anything except the surrounding wall to suggest to a team of horses which the course might be.

"Let none move!" he commanded. "I will crush the foot of any man who stirs!"

Attendants, clinging to the heads of four gray stallions that fought and kicked, brought out his chariot and others shut the gate behind it. Commodus admired the team a minute, then examined the new high wheels of the gilded chariot, that was hardly wider than a coffin—a thing that a man could upset with a shove and built to look as flimsy as an egg-shell. Suddenly he seized the reins and leaped in, throwing up his right hand.

If he could have ruled his empire as he drove that chariot he would have far outshone Augustus, for whose memory men sighed. He managed them with one hand. There was magnetism sent along the reins to play with the dynamic energy of four mad stallions as gods amuse themselves with men. If empire had amused him as athleticism did there would have been no equal in all history to Commodus.

In a chariot no other athlete could have balanced, on a course providing not one unobstructed stretch of fifty yards, he drove like Phœbus breaking in the horses of the Sun, careering this and that way, weaving patterns in among the frightened men who stood like posts for him to drive around. He missed them by a hand's breadth—less! He took delight in driving at them, turning in the last half-second, smiling at a blanched face as he wheeled and wove new figures down another zigzag avenue of men. The frenzy of the team inspired him; the rebellion of the stallions, made mad by the persistent, sudden turns, aroused his own astonishing enthusiasm. He accomplished the impossible! He made new laws of motion, breaking them, inventing others! He became a god in action, mastering the team until it had no consciousness of any self-will, or of any impulse but to loose its full strength under the directing will of genius.

The team tired first. It was its waning speed that wearied him at last. The mania that owned him could not tolerate the anticlimax of declining effort, so his mood changed. He became morose—indifferent. He reined in, tossed the reins to an attendant and began to walk toward the tunnel entrance, clothed as he was in nothing but the practise loin-cloth of a gladiator.

A dozen senators implored him to wait and clothe himself. He would not wait. He ordered them to bring his cloak and overtake him. Then he observed Narcissus, standing near the horse-gate, waiting to summon his trained gladiators for an exhibition.

"Not this time, Narcissus. Next time. Follow me."

He waited for a moment for Narcissus. That gave the substitute time to come down from the box and go hurrying ahead into the tunnel-mouth; he went so fast (for he knew the emperor's moods) that the attendants found it hard to keep up; most of them were half a dozen paces in the rear. A senator gave Commodus his cloak. He took Narcissus by the arm and strode ahead into the tunnel, muttering, ignoring noisy protests from the senators, who warned him that the guards were not yet there.

THEN there was sudden silence; possibly a consequence of Cæsar's mood, or the reaction caused by chill and tunnel-darkness after sunlit sand. Or it might have been the shadow of impending tragedy. A long scream broke the silence, thrice repeated, horrible, like something from an unseen world. Instantly Narcissus leaped ahead into the darkness, weaponless but armed by nature with the muscles of a panther. Commodus leaped after him; his mood reversed again. Now emulation had him; he would not be beaten to a scene of action by a gladiator. He let his cloak fall and a senator tripped over it.

There were no lamps. Something less than twilight, deepened here and there by shadow, filled the tunnel. By a niche intended for a sentry the attendants were standing helplessly around the body of a man who lay with head and shoulders propped against the wall. Narcissus and another, like knotted snakes, were writhing near by. There was a sound of choking. Pavonius Nasor was silent. He appeared already dead.

"Pluto! Is there no light?" Commodus demanded. "What has happened?"

"They have killed your shadow, sire!"

"Who killed him?"

"Men who sprang out of the darkness suddenly."

"One man. Only one. I have him here. He lives yet, but he dies!" Narcissus said.

He dragged a writhing body on the flagstones, holding it by one wrist.

"He was armed. I had to throttle him to save my liver from his knife. I think I broke his neck. He is certainly dying," said Narcissus.

Some one had gone for a lamp and came along the tunnel with it.

"Let me look," said Commodus. "Here, give me that lamp!"

He looked first at Pavonius Nasor, who gazed back at him with stupid, passionless, already dimming eyes. A stream of blood was gushing from below his left arm.

"Now the gods of heaven and hell, and all the strange gods that have no resting place, and all the spirits of the air and earth and sea, defile your spirit!" Commodus exploded. "Careless, irresponsible, ungrateful fool! You have deprived me of my liberty! You let yourself be killed like any sow under the butcher's knife, and dare to leave me shadowless? Then die like carrion and rot unburied!"

He began to kick him, but the stricken man's lips moved. Commodus bent down and tried to listen—tried again, mastered impatience and at last stood upright, shaking both fists at the tunnel roof.

"Omnipotent Progenitor of Lightnings!" he exploded. "He says he should have had stewed eels tonight!"

The watching senators mistook that for a cue to laugh. Their laughter touched off all the magazines of Cæsar's rage. He turned into a maniac. He tore at his own hair. He tore off his loin-cloth and stood naked. He tried to kill Narcissus, because Narcissus was the nearest to him. His crashing centurion's parade voice filled the tunnel.

"Dogs! Dogs' ullage! Vipers!" he yelled. "Who slew my shadow? Who did it? This is a conspiracy! Who hatched it? Bring my tablets! Warn the executioners! What is Commodus without his dummy? Vultures! Better have killed me than that poor obliging fool! You cursed, stupid idiots! You have killed my dummy! I must sit as he did and look on. I must swallow stinking air of throne-rooms. I must watch sluggards fight—you miserable, wanton imbeciles! It is Paulus you have killed! Do you appreciate that? Jupiter, but I will make Rome pay for this! Who did it? Who did it, I say?"

Rage blinded him. He did not see the choking wretch whose wrist Narcissus twisted, until he struck at Narcissus again and, trying to follow him, stumbled over the assassin.

"Who is this? Give me a sword, somebody! Is this the murderer? Bring that lamp here!"

Bolder than the others, having recently been praised, the senator Tullius brought the lamp and, kneeling, held it near the culprit's face. The murderer was beyond speech, hardly breathing, with his eyes half-bursting from the sockets and his tongue thrust forward through his teeth because Narcissus' thumbs had almost strangled him.

"A Christian," said Tullius.

There was a note of quiet exultation in his voice. The privileges of the Christians were a sore point with the majority of senators.

"A what?" demanded Commodus.

"A Christian. See—he has a cross and a fish engraved on bone and wears it hung from his neck beneath his tunic. Besides, I think I recognize the man. I think he is the one who waylaid Pertinax the other day and spoke strange stuff about a whore on seven hills whose days are numbered."

He had raised up the man's head by the hair. Commodus stamped on the face with the flat of his sandal, crushing the head on the flagstones.

"Christian!" he shouted. "Is this Marcia's doing? Is this Marcia's expedient to keep me out of the arena? Too long have I endured that rabble! I will rid Rome of the brood! They kill the shadow—they shall feel the substance!"

Suddenly he turned on his attendants—pointed at the murderer and his victim:

"Throw those two into the sewer! Strip them—strip them now—let none identify them. Seize those spineless fools who let the murder happen. Tie them. You, Narcissus—march them back to the arena. Have them thrown into the lions' cages. Stay there and see it done, then come and tell me."

The courtiers backed away from him as far out of the circle of the lamplight as the tunnel-wall would let them. He had snatched the lamp from Tullius. He held it high.

"Two parts of me are dead; the shadow that was satisfied with eels for supper and the immortal Paulus whom an empire worshiped. Remains me—the third part—Commodus! You shall regret those two dead parts of me!"

He hurled the lighted lamp into the midst of them and smashed it, then, in darkness, strode along the tunnel muttering and cursing as he went—stark naked.

CHAPTER X

"ROME IS TOO MUCH RULED BY WOMEN!"

"HE IS in the bath," said Marcia. She and Galen were alone with Pertinax, who looked splendid in his official toga. She was herself in disarray. Her woman had tried to dress her hair on the way in the litter; one long coil of it was tumbling on her shoulder. She looked almost drunken.

"Where is Flavia Titiana?" she demanded.

"Out," said Pertinax and shut his lips. He never let himself discuss his wife's activities. The peasant in him, and the orthodox grammarian, preferred less scandalous subjects.

Marcia stared long at him, her liquid, lazy eyes, suggesting banked fires in their depths, looking for signs of spirit that should rise to the occasion. But Pertinax preferred to choose his own occasions.

"Commodus is in the bath," Marcia repeated. "He will stay there until night comes. He is sulking. He has his tablets with him—writes and writes, then scratches out. He has shown what he writes to nobody, but he has sent for Livius."

"We should have killed that dog," said Pertinax, which brought a sudden laugh from Galen.

"A dog's death never saved an empire," Galen volunteered. "If you had murdered Livius the crisis would have come a few days sooner, that is all."

"It is the crisis. It has come," said Marcia. "Commodus came storming into my apartment, and I thought he meant to kill me with his own hands. Usually I am not afraid of him. This time he turned my strength to water. He yelled 'Christians!' at me, 'Christians! You and your Christians!' He was unbathed. He was half-naked. He was sweaty from his exercise. His hair was ruffled; he had torn out some of it. His scowl was frightful—it was freezing."

"He is quite mad," Galen commented.

"I tried to make him understand this could not be a plot or I would certainly have heard of it," Marcia went on with suppressed excitement. "I said it was the madness of one fanatic, that nobody could foresee. He wouldn't listen. He outroared me. He even raised his fist to strike. He swore it was another of my plans to keep him out of the arena. I began to think it might be wiser to admit that. Even in his worst moods he is sometimes softened by the thought that I take care of him and love him enough to risk his anger. But not this time! He flew into the worst passion I have ever seen. He returned to his first obsession, that the Christians plotted it and that I knew all about it. He swore he will butcher the Christians. He will rid Rome of them. He says, since he can not play Paulus any longer he will outplay Nero."

"Where is Sextus?" Pertinax asked.

"Aye! Where is Sextus!"

Marcia glared at Galen.

"We have to thank you for Sextus! You persuaded Pertinax to shield Sextus. Pertinax persuaded me."

"You *did* it!" Galen answered dryly. "It is what we do that matters. Squealing like a pig under a gate won't remedy the matter. You foresaw the crisis long ago. Sextus has been very useful to you. He has kept you informed, so don't lower yourself by turning on him now. What is the latest news about the other factions?"

Marcia restrained herself, biting her lip. She loved old Galen, but she did not relish being told the whole responsibility was hers, although she knew it.

"There is no news," she answered. "Nobody has heard a word about the murder yet. Commodus has had the bodies thrown into the sewer. But there are spies in the palace—"

"To say nothing of Bultius Livius," Pertinax added. He was clicking the rings on his fingers—a symptom of irresolution that made Marcia grit her teeth.

"The other factions are watching one another," Marcia went on. "They are irresolute because they have no leader near enough to Rome to strike without warning. Why are you irresolute?" She looked so hard at Pertinax that he got up and began to pace the floor. "Severus and his troops are in Pannonia. Pescennius Niger is in Syria. Clodius Albinus is in Britain. The senators are all so jealous and afraid for their own skins that they are as likely as not to betray one another to Commodus the minute they learn that a crisis exists. If they hear that Commodus is writing out proscription lists they will vie with one another to denounce their own pet enemies—including you—and me!" she added.

"There is one chance yet," said Pertinax. "Bultius Livius may have enough wisdom to denounce the leaders of the other factions and to clear us. None of the others would be grateful to him. That Carthaginian Severus, for instance, is invariably spiteful to the men who do him favors. Bultius Livius may see that to protect us is his safest course, as well as best for Rome."

He had more to say, but Marcia's scorn interrupted him. Galen chuckled.

"Rome! He cares only for Bultius Livius. It is now or never, Pertinax!"

Marcia's intense emotion made her appear icily indifferent, but she did not deceive Galen, although Pertinax welcomed her calmness as excusing unenthusiasm in herself.

"Marcia is right," said Galen. "It is now or never. Marcia ought to know Commodus!"

"Know him?" she exploded. "I can tell you step by step what he will do! He will come out of the bath and eat a light meal, but he will drink nothing, for fear of poison. Presently he will be thirsty and lonely, and will send for me; and whatever he feels, he will pretend he loves me. When the raging fear is on him he will never drink from any one but me. He will take a cup of wine from my hands, making me taste it first. Then he will go alone into his own room, where only that child Telamonion will dare to follow. Everything depends then on the child. If the child should happen to amuse him he will turn sentimental and I will dare to go in and talk to him. If not—"

Galen interrupted.

"Madness," he said, "resembles many other maladies, there being symptoms frequently for many years before the slow fire bursts into a blaze. Some die before the outbreak, being burned up by the generating process, which is like a slow fire. But if they survive until the explosion, it is more violent the longer it has been delayed. And in the case of Commodus that means that other men will die. And women," he added, looking straight at Marcia.

"If he even pretends he loves me—I am a woman," said Marcia. "I love him in spite of his frenzies. If I only had myself to think of—"

"Think then!" Galen interrupted. "If you can't think for yourself, do you expect to benefit the world by thinking?"

MARCIA buried her face in her hands and lay face downward on the couch. She was trembling in a struggle for self-mastery. Pertinax chewed at his finger-nails, which were the everlasting subject of his proud wife's indignation; he never kept his fine hands properly; the peasant in him thought such refinements effeminate, unsoldierly. Cornificia, who could have made him submit even to a manicure, understood him too well to insist.

"Galen!" said Marcia, sitting up suddenly.

The old man blinked. He recognized decision sudden and irrevocable. He clenched his fingers and his lower lip came forward by the fraction of an inch.

"I must save my Christians. What do you know about poisons?" she demanded.

"Less than many people," Galen answered. "I have studied antidotes. I am a doctor. Those I poisoned thought as I did, that I gave them something for their health. My methods have changed with experience. Doctoring is like statesmanship—which is to say, groping in the dark through mazes of misinformation."

"Know you a poison," asked Marcia, "that will not harm one who merely tastes it, but will kill whoever drinks a quantity? Something without flavor? Something colorless that can be mixed with wine? Know you a safe poison, Galen?"

"Aye—irresolution!" Galen answered. "I will not be made a victim of it. Who shall aspire to the throne if Commodus dies?"

"Pertinax!"

Pertinax looked startled, stroking his beard, uncrossing his knees.

"Then let Pertinax do his own work," said Galen. "Rome is full of poisoners, but hasn't Pertinax a sword?"

"Aye. And it has been the emperor's until this minute," Pertinax said grimly. "Galen tells us Commodus is mad. And I agree that Rome deserves a better emperor. But whether I am fit to be that emperor is something not yet clear to me. I doubt it. Whom the Fates select for such a purpose, they compel, and he is unwise who resists them. I will not resist. But let there be no doubt on this point: I will not slay Commodus. I will not draw sword against the man to whom I owe my fortune. I am not an ingrate. Sextus lives for his revenge. If you should ask me I would answer, Sextus planned this murder in the tunnel and the blow was meant for Commodus himself. I am inclined to deal with Sextus firmly. It is not too late. There is a chance that Commodus, deprived now of his opportunities to make himself a spectacle, may bend his energies to government. Madman though he is, he is the emperor, and if he is disposed now to govern well, with capable advisers, I would be the last to turn on him."

"If he will be advised by you?" suggested Marcia, her accent tart with sarcasm. "What will you advise him about Sextus?"

"There are plenty of ways of getting rid of Sextus without killing him," said Pertinax. "He is a young man needing outlets for his energy and fuel for his pride. If he were sent to Parthia, in secret, as an agent authorized to penetrate that country and report on military, geographical and economic facts—"

"He would refuse to go!" said Galen. "And if made to go, he would return! O Pertinax—!"

"*Fave linguæ!*" * Pertinax retorted irritably. "I will not submit to being lectured. I am Governor of Rome—though you *are* Galen the philosopher. And I remember many of your adages this minute, as for instance: 'It is he who acts who is responsible.' To kill an emperor is easy, Galen. To replace him is as difficult as to fit a new head to a body. We have talked a lot of treason, most of it nonsense. I have listened to too much of it. I am as guilty as the others. But when it comes to slaying Commodus and standing in his shoes—"

Marcia interrupted.

"By the great Twin Brethren, Pertinax! Who can be surprized that Flavia Titiana seeks amusement in the arms of other men! Does Cornificia endure such peasant talk? Or do you keep it to impose on us as a relief from her more noble conversation? *Dea Dia!* Had I known how spineless you can be I would have set my cap at Lucius Severus long ago. It may be it is not too late."

She had him! She had pricked him in the one place where he could be stirred to spitefulness. His whole face crimsoned suddenly.

"That Carthaginian!" He came and stood in front of her. "If you had favored him you should have foregone my friendship, Marcia! Commodus is bad enough. Severus would be ten times worse! Where Commodus is merely crazy, Lucius Severus is a calculating, ice-cold monster of cruelty! He has no emotions except those aroused by venom! He would tear out your heart just as swiftly as mine! As for plotting with him, he would let you do it all and then denounce you to the senate after he was on the throne!"

"Either it must be Severus, or else you!" said Marcia. "Which is it to be?"

Pertinax folded his arms.

"I would feel it my duty to preserve Rome from Severus. But you go too fast. Our Commodus is on the throne—"

"And writes proscription lists!" said Marcia. "Who knows what names are on the lists already? Who knows what Bultius Livius may have told him? Who knows which of us will be alive tomorrow morning? Who knows what Sextus is doing? If Sextus has heard of this crisis he will seize the moment and either arouse the prætorian guard to mutiny or else reach Commodus himself and slay him with his own hand! Sextus is a man! Are you no more than Flavia Titiana's cuckold and Cornificia's plaything?"

"I am a Roman," Pertinax retorted angrily. "I think of Rome before myself.

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* Shut up!

You women only think of passion and ambition. Rome—city of a thousand triumphs!" He turned away, pacing the floor again, knitting his fingers behind him. "Pertinax would offer up himself if he might bring back the Augustan days—if he might win the warfare that Tiberius lost. One Pertinax is nothing in the life of Rome. One life, three-quarters spent, is but a poor pledge to the gods—yet too much to be thrown away in vain. The auguries are all mixed nowadays. I doubt them. I mistrust the shaven priests who dole out answers in return for minted money. I have knelt before the holy shrine of Vesta, but the Virgins were as vague as the Egyptian who prophesied—"

He hesitated.

"What?" demanded Marcia.

"That I should serve Rome and receive ingratitude. What else does any man receive who serves Rome? They who cheat her are the ones who prosper!"

"Send for Cornificia," said Marcia. "She keeps your resolution. Let her come and loose it!"

Pertinax turned sharply on her.

"Flavia Titiana shall not suffer that indignity. Cornificia can not enter this house."

But the mention of Cornificia's name wrought just as swift a change in him as had the name of Lucius Severus. He began to bite his finger-nails, then clenched his hands again behind him, Galen and Marcia watching.

"You are the only one who can replace Commodus without drenching Rome in blood," said Marcia, remembering a phrase of Cornificia's. And since the words were Cornificia's, and stirred the chords of many memories, they produced a sort of half-way resolution.

"It is now or never," Marcia said, goading him.

But Pertinax shook his head.

"I am not convinced, though I would do my best to save Rome from Severus. *Dioscuri!*—do you realize, this plot to make me emperor is known to not more than a dozen—"

"Therein safety lies," said Marcia. "Yourself included there can only be a dozen traitors!"

"Rome is too much ruled by women! I will not kill Commodus, and I will give him this one chance," said Pertinax. "I will protect him, unless and until I shall discover proof that he intends to turn on you, or me, or any of my friends."

"You may discover that too late!" said Marcia; but she seemed to understand him and looked satisfied. "Come tonight to the palace— Galen," she added, "come you also—and bring poison!"

Galen met her gaze and shut his lips tight.

"Galen," she said, "either you will do this or—I have been your friend. Now be you mine! It is too risky to send one of my slaves to fetch a poison. You are to come tonight and bring the poison with you. Otherwise—you understand?"

"You are extremely comprehensible!" said Galen, pursing up his lips.

"You will obey?"

"I must," said Galen. But he did not say whether he would obey her or his inclination. Pertinax, eyeing him doubtfully, seemed torn between suspicion of him and respect for long-tried friendship.

"May we depend on you?" he asked. He laid a hand on Galen's shoulder, bending over him.

"I am an old man," Galen answered. "In any event I have not long to live. I will do my best—for you."

Pertinax nodded, but there was still a question in his mind. He bade farewell to Marcia, turning his back toward Galen. Marcia whispered:

"Be a man now, Pertinax! If we should lose this main, we two can drink the stuff that Galen brings."

"There was a falling star last night," said Pertinax. "Whose was it?"

Marcia studied his face a moment. Then:

"There will be a rising sun tomorrow!" she retorted. "Whose will it be? Yours! Play the man!"

CHAPTER XI

GALEN

GALEN'S house was one he rented from a freedman of the emperor—a wise means of retaining favor at the palace. Landlords having influence were careful to protect good tenants. Furthermore, whoever rented, rather than possessed, escaped more easily from persecution. Galen, like Tyanan Apollonius, reduced his private needs, maintaining that philosophy went hand in hand with medicine, but wealth with neither.

It was a pleasant little house, not far away from Cornificia's, within a precinct that was rebuilt after all that part of Rome burned under Nero's fascinated gaze. The street was crescent-shaped, not often crowded, though a score of passages like wheel-spokes led to it; and to the rear of Galen's house was a veritable maze of alleys. There were two gates to the house: one wide, with decorated posts, that faced the crescent street, where Galen's oldest slave sat on a stool and blinked at passers-by; the other narrow, leading from a little high-walled courtyard at the rear into an alley between stables in which milch-asses were kept. That alley led into another where a dozen midwives had their names and claims to excellency painted on the doors—an alley carefully to be avoided, because women of that trade, like barbers, vied for custom by disseminating gossip.

So Sextus used a passage running parallel to that one, leading between workshops where the burial-urn makers' slaves engraved untruthful epitaphs in baked clay or inlaid them on the marble tomb-slabs—to be gilded presently with gold-leaf (since a gilded lie, though costlier, is no worse than the same lie unadorned.)

He drummed a signal with his knuckles on the panel of a narrow door of olive-wood, set deep into the wall under a projecting arch. An overleaning tree increased the shadow, and a visitor could wait without attracting notice. A slave nearly as old as Galen presently admitted him into a paved yard in which a fish-pond had been built around an ancient well. A few old fruit-trees grew against the wall, and there were potted shrubs, but little evidence of gardening, most of Galen's slaves being too old for that kind of work. There were a dozen of them loafing in the yard; some were so fat that they wheezed, and some so thin with age that they resembled skeletons. There was a rumor that the fatness and the thinness were accounted for by Galen's fondness for experiments. Old Galen had a hundred jealous rivals and they even said he fed the dead slaves to the fish; but it was Roman custom to give no man credit for humaneness if an unclean accusation could be made to stick.

Another fat old slave led Sextus to a porch behind the house and through that to a library extremely bare of furniture but lined with shelves on which rolled manuscripts were stacked in tagged and numbered order; they were dusty, as if Galen used them very little nowadays. There were two doors in addition to the one that opened on the porch; the old slave pointed to the smaller one and Sextus, stooping and turning sidewise because of the narrowness between the posts, went down a step and entered without knocking.

For a moment he could not see Galen, there was such confusion of shadow and light. High shelves around the walls of a long, shed-like room were crowded with retorts and phials. An enormous, dusty human skeleton, articulated on concealed wire, moved as if annoyed by the intrusion. There were many kinds of skulls of animals and men on brackets fastened to the wall, and there were jars containing dead things soaked in spirit. Some of the jars were enormous, having once held olive oil. On a table down the midst were instruments, a scale for weighing chemicals, some measures and a charcoal furnace with a blow-pipe; and across the whole of one end of the room was a system of wooden pigeon-holes, stacked with chemicals and herbs, for the most part wrapped in parchment.

Sunlight streaming through narrow windows amid dust of drugs and spices made a moving mystery; the room seemed under water. Galen, stooping over a crucible with an unrolled parchment on the table within reach, was not distinguishable until he moved; when he ceased moving he faded out again, and Sextus had to go and stand where he could touch him, to believe that he was really there.

"You told me you had ceased experiments."

"I lied. The universe is an experiment," said Galen. "Such gods as there are perhaps are looking to evolve a decent man, or possibly a woman, from the mess we see around us. Let us hope they fail."

"Why?"

"There appears to be hope in failure. Should the gods fail, they will still be gods and go on trying. If they ever make a decent man or woman all the rest of us would turn on their creation and destroy it. Then the gods would turn into devils and destroy us."

"What has happened to you, Galen? Why the bitter mood?"

"I discover I am like the rest of you—

like all Rome. At my age such a discovery makes for bitterness." For a minute or two Galen went on scraping powder from the crucible, then suddenly he looked up at Sextus, stepping backward so as to see the young man's face more clearly in a shaft of sunlight.

"Did *you* send that Christian into the tunnel to kill Commodus?" he asked.

"I? You know me better than that, Galen! When the time comes to slay Commodus—but is Commodus dead? Speak, don't stand there looking at me! Speak, man!"

Galen appeared satisfied.

"No, not Commodus. The blow miscarried. Somebody slew Nasor. A mistake. A coward's blow. If you had been responsible—"

"When—if—I slay, it shall be openly with my own hand," said Sextus. "Not I alone, but Rome herself must vomit out that monster. Why are you vexed?"

"That wanton blow that missed its mark has stripped some friends of mine too naked. It has also stripped me and revealed me to myself. Last night I saw a falling star—a meteor that blazed out of the night and vanished."

"I, too," said Sextus. "All Rome saw it. The cheap sorcerers are doing a fine trade. They declare it portends evil."

"Evil — but for whom?" Old Galen poured the powder he had scraped into a dish and blinked at him. "Affiliations in the realm of substance are confined to like ingredients. That law is universal. Like seeks like, begetting its own like. As for instance, sickness flows in channels of unwholesomeness, like water seeping through a marsh. Evil? What is evil but the likeness of a deed—its echo—its result—its aftermath? You see this powder? Marcia has ordered me to poison Commodus! What kind of aftermath should that deed have?"

Sextus stared at him astonished. Galen went on mixing.

"Colorless it must be—flavorless—without smell—indetectible. These saviors of Rome prepare too much to save themselves! And I take trouble to save *my*self. Why?"

He stopped and blinked again at Sextus, waiting for an answer.

"You are worth preserving, Galen."

"I dispute that. I am sentimental, which is idiocy in a man of my age. But I will not kill him who is superior to any man in Rome."

"Idiocy? You? And you admire that monster?"

"As a monster, yes. He is at least wholehearted. As a monster he lacks neither strength of will nor sinew nor good looks; he is magnificent; he has the fear, the frenzy and the resolution of a splendid animal. We have only cowardice, the unenthusiasm and the indecision of base men. If we had the virtue of Commodus, no Commodus could ever have ruled Rome for half a day. But I am senile. I am sentimental. Rather than betray Marcia—and Pertinax—who would betray me for their own sakes; rather than submit my own old carcass to the slave whom Marcia would send to kill me, I am doing what you see."

"Poison for Commodus?"

"No."

"Not for yourself, Galen?"

"No."

"For whom then?"

"For Pertinax."

Sextus seized the plate on which the several ingredients were being mixed.

"Put that down," said Galen. "I will poison part of him—the mean part."

"Speak in plain words, Galen!"

"I will slay his indecision. He and Marcia propose that I shall kill their monster. I shall mix a draught for Marcia to take to him—in case this, and in case that, and perhaps. In plain words, Commodus has sent for Livius and none knows how much Livius has told. Their monster writes and scratches out and rewrites long proscription lists, and Marcia trembles for her Christians. For herself she does not tremble. She has ten times Pertinax' ability to rule. If Marcia were a man she should be emperor! Our Pertinax is hesitating between inertia and doubt and dread of Cornificia's ambition for him; between admiration of his own wife and contempt for her; between the subtleties of auguries and common sense; between trust and mistrust of us all, including Marcia and you and me; between the easy dignity of being governor of Rome and the uneasy palace-slavery of being Cæsar; between doubt of his own ability to rule and the will to restore the republic."

"We all know Pertinax," said Sextus. "He is diffident, that is all. He is modest. Once he has made his decision—"

Galen interrupted him:

"Then let us pray the gods to make the rest of us immodest! The decision that he makes is this: If Commodus has heard of the conspiracy; if Commodus intends to kill him, he will then allow somebody else to kill Commodus! He will permit me, who am a killer only by professional mistake and not by intention, to be made to kill my former pupil with a poisoned drink! You understand, not even then will Pertinax take resolution by the throat and do his own work."

"So Pertinax shall drink this?"

"It is meant that Commodus shall drink it. That is, unless Commodus emerges from his sulks too soon and butchers all of us—as we deserve!"

"Have done with riddles, Galen! How will that affect Pertinax, except to make him emperor?"

"Nothing will make him emperor unless he makes himself," said Galen. "You will know tonight. We lack a hero, Sextus. All conspirators resemble rats that gnaw and run, until one rat at last discovers himself Cæsar of the herd by accident. Caius Julius Caesar was a hero. He was one mind bold and above and aloof. He saw. He considered. He took. His murderers were all conspirators, who ran like rats and turned on one another. So are we! Can you imagine Caius Julius Cæsar threatening an old philosopher like me with death unless he mixed the poison for a woman to take to his enemy's bedside? Can you imagine the great Julius hesitating to destroy a friend or spare an enemy?"

"Do you mean, they strike tonight, and haven't warned me?"

"I have warned you."

"Marcia has been prepared these many days to kill me if I meant to strike," said Sextus. "I can understand that; it is no more than a woman's method to protect her bully. She accuses and defends him, fears and loves him, hates him and hates more the man who sets her free. But Pertinax—did he not bid you warn me?"

"No," said Galen. "Are you looking for nobility? I tell you there is nothing noble in conspiracies. Pertinax and Marcia have used you. They will try to use me. They will blame me. They will certainly blame you. I advise you to run to your friends in the Aventine Hills. Thence hasten out of Italy. If Pertinax should fail and Commodus survives this night—"

"No, Galen. He must not fail! Rome needs Pertinax. That poison—phaugh! Is no sword left in Rome? Has Pertinax no iron in him? Better one of Marcia's long pins than that unmanly stuff. Where is Narcissus?"

"I don't know," said Galen. "Narcissus is another who will do well to protect himself. Commodus is well disposed toward him. Commodus might send for him—as he will surely send for me if belly-burning sets in. He and I would make a good pair to be blamed for murdering an emperor."

"You run!" urged Sextus. "Go now! Go to my camp in the Aventines. You will find Norbanus and two freedmen waiting near the Porta Capena; they are wearing farmers' clothes and look as if they came from Sicily. They know you. Say I bade them take you into hiding."

Galen smiled at him.

"And you?" he asked.

"Narcissus shall smuggle me into the palace. It is I who will slay Commodus, lest Pertinax should stain his hands. If they prefer to turn on me, what matter? Pertinax, if he is to be Cæsar, will do better not to mount the throne all bloody. Let him blame me and then execute me. Rome will reap the benefit. Marcia has the prætorian guard well under control, what with her bribes and all the license she has begged for them. Let Marcia proclaim that Pertinax is Cæsar, the prætorian guard will follow suit, and the senate will confirm it so soon after daybreak that the citizens will find themselves obeying a new Cæsar before they know the old one is dead! Then let Pertinax make new laws and restore the ancient liberties. I will die happy."

"O youth—insolence of youth!" said Galen, smiling. He resumed his mixing of the powders, adding new ingredients. "I was young once—young and insolent. I dared to try to tutor Commodus! But never in my long life was I insolent enough to claim all virtue for myself and bid my elders go and hide! You think you will slay Commodus? I doubt it."

"How so?"

Sextus was annoyed. The youth in him resented that his altruism should be mocked.

"Pertinax should do it," Galen answered. "If Rome needed no more than philosophy and grammar, better make me Cæsar! I was mixing my philosophy with surgery and medicine while Pertinax was sucking at his mother's breast in a Ligurian hut. Rome, my son, is sick of too much mixed philosophy. She needs a man of iron—a riser to occasion—a cutter of Gordian knots, precisely as a sick man needs a surgeon. The senate will vote, as you say, at the prætorian guard's dictation. You have been clever, my Sextus, with your stirring of faction against faction. They are mean men, all so full of mutual suspicion as to heave a huge sigh when they know that Pertinax is Cæsar, knowing he will overlook their plotting and rule without bloodshed if that can be done. But it can't be! Unless Pertinax is man enough to strike the blow that shall restore the ancient liberties, then he is better dead before he tries to play the savior! We have a tyrant now. Shall we exchange him for a weak-kneed theorist?"

"Are you ready to die, Galen?"

"Why not? Are you the only Roman? I am not so old I have no virtue left. A little wisdom comes with old age, Sextus. It is better to live for one's country than to die for it, but since no way has been invented of avoiding death, it is wiser to die usefully than like a sandal thrown on to the rubbish-heap because the fashion changes."

"I wish you would speak plainly, Galen. I have told you all my secrets. You have seen me risk my life a thousand times in the midst of Commodus' informers, coming and going, interviewing this and that one, urging here, restraining there, denying myself even hope of personal reward. You know I have been whole-hearted in the cause of Pertinax. Is it right, in a crisis, to put me off with subtleties?"

"Life is subtle. So is virtue. So is this stuff," Galen answered, poking at the mixture with a bronze spoon. "Every man must choose his own way in a crisis. Some one's star has fallen. Commodus'? I think not. That star blazed out of obscurity, and Commodus is not obscure. Mine? I am unimportant; I shall make no splendor in the heavens when my hour comes. Marcia's? Is she obscure? Yours? You are like me, not born to the purple; when a sparrow dies, however diligently he has labored in the dirt, no meteors announce his fall. No, not Maternus, the outlaw, to say nothing of Sextus, the legally dead man, can command such notice from the sky. That meteor was some one's who shall blaze into fame and then die."

"Dark words, Galen!"

"Dark deeds!" the old man answered. "And a path to be chosen in darkness! Shall I poison the man whom I taught as a boy? Shall I refuse, and be drowned in the sewer by Marcia's slaves? Shall I betray my friends to save my own old carcass? Shall I run away and hide, at my age, and live hounded by my own thoughts, fearful of my shadow, eating charity from peasants? I can easily say no to all those things. What then? It is not what a man does not, but what he does that makes him or unmakes him. There is nothing left but subtlety, my Sextus. What will *you* do? Go and do it now. Tomorrow may be too late."

Sextus shrugged his shoulders, baffled and irritated. He had always looked to Galen for advice in a predicament. It was Galen, in fact, who had kept him from playing much more than the part of a spy—listening, talking, suggesting, but forever doing nothing violent.

"You know as well as I do, there is nothing ready," he retorted. "Long ago I could have had a thousand armed men waiting for a moment such as this to rally behind Pertinax. But I listened to you—"

"And are accordingly alive, not crucified!" said Galen. "The prætorian guard is well able to slaughter any thousand men, to uphold Commodus or to put Pertinax in the place of Commodus. Your thousand men would only decorate a thousand gibbets, whether Pertinax should win or lose. If he should win, and become Cæsar, he would have to make them an example of his love of law and order, proving his impartiality by blaming them for what he never invited them to do. For mark this: Pertinax has never named himself as Commodus' successor. I warn you: there is far less safety for his friends than for his enemies, unless he, with his own hand, strikes the blow that makes him emperor."

"If Marcia should do it—?"

"That would be the end of Marcia."

"If I should do it?"

"That would be the end of you, my Sextus."

"Let us say farewell, then, Galen! This right hand shall do it. It will save my friends. It will provide a culprit on whom Pertinax may lay the blame. He will ascend the throne unguilty of his predecessor's blood—"

"And you?" asked Galen.

"I will take my own life. I will gladly die when I have ridded Rome of Commodus."

He paused, awaiting a reply, but Galen appeared almost rudely unconcerned.

"You will not say farewell?"

"It is too soon," Galen answered, folding up his powder in a sheet of parchment, tying it, at great pains to arrange the package neatly.

"Will you not wish me success?"

"That is something, my Sextus, that I have no powders for. I have occasionally cured men. I can set most kinds of fractures with considerable skill, old though I am. And I can divert a man's attention sometimes, so that he lets nature heal him of mysterious diseases. But success is something you have already wished for and have already made or unmade. What you did, my Sextus, is the scaffolding of what you do now; this, in turn, of what you will do next. I gave you my advice. I bade you run away—in which case I would bid you farewell, but not otherwise."

"I will not run."

"I heard you."

"And you said you are sentimental, Galen!"

"I have proved it to you. If I were not, I myself would run!"

Galen led the way out of the room into the hall where the mosaic floor and plastered walls presented colored temple scenes—priests burning incense at the shrine of Æsculapius, the sick and maimed arriving and the cured departing, giving praise.

"There will be no hero left in Rome when they have slain our Roman Hercules," said Galen. "He has been a triton in a pond of minnows. You and I and all the other little men may not regret him afterward, since heroes, and particularly mad ones, are not madly loved. But we will not enjoy the rivalry of minnows."

He led Sextus to the porch and stood there for a minute holding to his arm.

"There will be no rivals who will dare to raise their heads," said Sextus, "once our Pertinax has made his bid for power."

"But he will not," Galen answered. "He will hesitate and let others do the bidding. Too many scruples! He who would govern an empire might better have fetters on feet and hands! Now go. But go not to the palace if you hope to see a heroism—or tomorrow's dawn!"

CHAPTER XII

LONG LIVE CÆSAR!

THAT night it rained. The wind blew yelling squalls along the streets. At intervals the din of hail on cobble-stones and roofs became a stinging sea of sound. The wavering oil lanterns died out one by one and left the streets in darkness in which now and then a slave-borne litter labored like a boat caught spreading too much sail. The overloaded sewers backed up and made pools of foulness, difficult to ford. Along the Tiber banks there was panic where the river-boats were plunging and breaking adrift on the rising flood and miserable, drenched slaves labored with the bales of merchandize, hauling the threatened stuff to higher ground.

But the noisiest, dismalest place was the palace, the heart of all Rome, where the rain and hail dinned down on marble. There was havoc in the clumps of ornamental trees—crashing of pots blown down from balconies—thunder of rent awnings and the splashing of countless cataracts where overloaded gutters spilled their surplus on mosaic pavement fifty or a hundred feet below. No light showed, saving at the guard-house by the main gate, where a group of sentries shrugged themselves against the wall—ill-tempered, shivering, alert. However mutinous a Roman army, or a legion, or a guard might be, its individuals were loyal to the routine work of military duty.

A decurion stepped out beneath a splashing arch, the lamplight gleaming on his wetted bronze and crimson.

"Narcissus? Yes, I recognize you. Who is this?"

Narcissus and Sextus were shrouded in loose, hooded cloaks of raw wool, under which they hugged a change of footgear. Sextus had his face well covered. Narcissus pushed him forward under the guardroom arch, out of the rain.

"This is a man from Antioch, whom Cæsar told me to present to him," he said. "I know him well. His name is Marius."

"I have no orders to admit a man of that name."

Narcissus waxed confidential.

"Do you wish to get both of us into trouble?" he asked. "You know Cæsar's way. He said bring him and forgot, I suppose, to tell his secretary to write the order for admission. Tonight he will remember my speaking to him about this expert with a javelin, and if I have to tell him—"

"Speak with the centurion."

The decurion beckoned them into the guard-house, where a fire burned in a bronze tripod, casting a warm glow on walls hung with shields and weapons. A centurion, munching oily seed and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, came out of an inner office. He was not the type that had made Roman arms invincible. He lacked the self-reliant dignity of an old campaigner, substituting for it self-assertiveness and flashy manners. He was annoyed because he could not get the seed out of his mouth with his finger in time to look aristocratic.

"What now, Narcissus? By Bacchus, no! No irregularities tonight! The very gods themselves are imitating Cæsar's ill-humor! Who is it you have brought?"

Narcissus beckoned the centurion toward the corner, between fire and wall, where he could whisper without risk of being overheard.

"Marcia told me to bring this man tonight in hope of making Cæsar change his mood. He is a javelin-thrower—an expert."

"Has he a javelin under that cloak?" the centurion asked suspiciously.

"He is unarmed, of course. Do you take us for madmen?"

"All Rome is mad tonight," said the centurion, "or I wouldn't be arguing with a gladiator! Tell me what you know. A sentry said you saw the death of Pavonius Nasor. All the sentries who were in the tunnel at the time are under lock and key, and I expect to be ordered to have the poor devils killed to silence them. And now Bultius Livius—have you heard about it?"

"I have heard Cæsar sent for him."

"Well, if Cæsar has sent for this friend of yours, he had better first make sacrifices to his gods and pray for something better than befell poor Livius! Yourself too! They say Livius is being racked—doubtless to make him tell more than he knows. I smell panic in the air. With all these palace slaves coming and going you can't check rumor and I'll wager there is already an exodus from Rome. Gods! What a night for travel! Morning will see the country roads all choked with the conveyances of bogged up senators! Let us pray this friend of yours may soften Cæsar's mood. Where is his admission paper?"

"As I told the decurion, I have none."

"That settles it then; he can't enter. No risks—not when I know the mood our Commodus is in! The commander might take the responsibility, but not I."

"Where is he?" asked Narcissus.

"Where any lucky fellow is on such a night—in bed. I wouldn't dare to send for him for less than riots, mutiny and all Rome burning! Let your man wait here. Go you into the palace and get a written permit for him."

But nothing was more probable than that such a permit would be unobtainable.

SEXTUS stepped into the firelight, pulling back the hood to let the centurion see his face.

"By Mars' red plume! Are you the man they call Maternus?"

Sextus retorted with a challenge:

"Now will you send for your commander? He knows me well."

"*Dioscuri!* Doubtless! Probably you robbed him of his purse! By Romulus and Remus, what is happening to Rome? That falling star last night portended, did it, that a highwayman should dare to try to enter Cæsar's palace! Ho there, decurion! Bring four men!"

The decurion clanked in. His men surrounded Sextus at a gesture.

"I ought to put you both in cells," said the centurion. "But you shall have a chance to justify yourself, Narcissus. Go on in. Bring Cæsar's written order to release this man Maternus—if you can!"

Narcissus, like all gladiators, had been trained in facial control lest an antagonist should be forewarned by his expression. Nevertheless, he was hard put to it to hide the fear that seized him. He supposed not even Marcia would dare openly to come to Sextus' rescue.

"That man is my only friend," he said. "Let me have word with him first."

"Not one word!"

The centurion made a gesture with his head. The guards took Sextus by the arms and marched him out into the night, he knowing better than to waste energy or arouse anger by resisting.

"Then I will go to the commander! I go straight to him," Narcissus stammered. "Idiot! Don't you know that Marcia protects Maternus? Otherwise, how should an outlaw whose face is so well known that you recognized him instantly—how should he dare to approach the palace?"

The centurion touched his forehead. "Mad, I daresay! Go on in. Get Marcia's protection for him. Bring me her command in writing! Wait, though—let me look at you."

He made Narcissus throw his heavy cloak off, clean his legs and change into his other foot-gear. Then he examined his costume.

"Even on a night like this they'd punish me for letting a man pass who wasn't dressed right. Let me see, you're not free yet; you don't have to wear a toga. I spend half my days teaching clodhoppers how to fold hired togas properly behind the neck. It's the only way you can tell a slave from a citizen these days! The prætorian guard ought to be recruited from the tailors' shops! Lace up your sandal properly. Now—any weapons underneath that tunic?"

Sullenly Narcissus held his arms up and submitted to be searched. He usually came and went unchallenged, being known as one of Cæsar's favorites, but the centurion's suspicions were aroused. They were almost confirmed a moment later. The decurion returned and laid a long, lean dagger on the table.

"Taken from the prisoner," he reported. "It was hidden beneath his tunic. He looks desperate enough to kill himself, so I left two men to keep an eye on him."

The centurion scratched his chin again, his mouth half-open.

"Whom do you propose to visit in the palace?" he demanded.

"Marcia," said Narcissus.

The centurion turned to the decurion. "Go you with him. Hand him over to the hall-attendants. Bid them pass him from hand to hand into Marcia's presence. Don't return until you have word he has reached her."

To all intents and purposes a prisoner, Narcissus was marched along the mosaic pavement of a bronze-roofed colonnade, whose marble columns flanked the approach to the palace steps. Drenched guards, posted near the eaves where water splashed on them clanged their shields in darkness as the decurion passed; there was not a square yard of the palace grounds unwatched.

There was a halt beside the little marble pavilion near the palace steps, where the decurion turned Narcissus over to an attendant in palace uniform, but no comment; the palace was too used to seeing favorites of one day in disgrace the next.

Within the palace there was draughtily lighted gloom, a sensation of dread and mysterious restlessness. The bronze doors leading to the emperor's apartments were shut and guards posted outside them who demanded extremely definite reasons for admitting any one; even when the centurion's message was delivered some one had to be sent in first to find out whether Marcia was willing, and for nearly half an hour Narcissus waited, biting his lip with impatience.

When he was sent for at last, and accompanied in, he found Marcia, Pertinax and Galen seated unattended in the gorgeous, quiet anteroom next to the emperor's bedchamber. The outer storm was hardly audible through the window-shutters, but there was an atmosphere of impending climax, like the hush and rumble that precedes eruptions.

Marcia nodded and dismissed the attendant who had brought Narcissus. There was a strained look about her eyes, a tightening at the corners of the mouth. Her voice was almost hoarse:

"What is it? You bring bad news, Narcissus! What has happened?"

"Sextus has been arrested by the main gate guard!"

Galen came out of a reverie. Pertinax bit at his nails and looked startled; worry had made him look as old as Galen, but his shoulders were erect and he was very splendid in his jeweled full dress. None spoke; they waited on Marcia, who turned the news over in her mind a minute.

"When? Why?" she asked at last.

"He proposed I should smuggle him in, that he might be of service to you. He was stormy-minded. He said Rome may need a determined man tonight. But the centurion of the guard recognized him—knew he is Maternus. He refused to summon the commander. Sextus is locked in a cell, and there is no knowing what the guards may do to him. They may try to make him talk. Please write and order him released."

"Yes, order him released," said Pertinax.

But Marcia's strained lips flickered with the vestige of a smile.

"A determined man!" she said, her eyes on Pertinax. "By morning a determined man might give his own commands. Sextus is safe where he is. Let him stay there until you have power to release him! Go and wait in the outer room, Narcissus."

Narcissus had no alternative. Though he could sense the climax with the marrow of his bones, he did not dare to disobey. He might have rushed into the emperor's bedroom to denounce the whole conspiracy and offer himself as bodyguard in the emergency. That might have won Commodus' gratitude; it might have opened up a way for liberating Sextus. But there was irresolution in the air. And besides, he knew that Sextus would reckon it a treason to himself to be made beholden for his life to Commodus, nor would he forgive betrayal of his friends, Pertinax, and Marcia and Galen.

SO NARCISSUS, who cared only for Sextus, reckoning no other man on earth his friend, went and sat beyond the curtains in the smaller, outer room, straining his ears to catch the conversation and wondering what tragedy the gods might have in store. As gladiator his philosophy was mixed of fatalism, cynical irreverence, a semi-military instinct of obedience, short-sightedness and self-will. He reckoned Marcia no better than himself because she, too, was born in slavery—and Pertinax not vastly better than himself because he was a charcoal-burner's son. But it did not enter his head just then that he might be capable of making history.

Marcia well understood him. Knowing that he could not escape to confer with the slaves in the corridor, because the door leading to the corridor from the smaller anteroom was locked, she was at no pains to prevent his overhearing anything. He could be dealt with either way, at her convenience; a reward might seal his lips, or she could have him killed the instant that his usefulness was ended, which was possibly not yet.

"Sextus," she said, "must be dealt with. Pertinax, you are the one who should attend to it. As governor of Rome you can—"

"He is thoroughly faithful," said Pertinax. "He has been very useful to us."

"Yes," said Marcia, "but usefulness has limits. Time comes when wine-jars need resealing, else the wine spills. Galen, go in and see the emperor."

Galen shook his head.

"He is a sick man," said Marcia. "I think he has a fever."

Galen shook his head again.

"I will not have it said I poisoned him."

"Nonsense! Who knows that you mixed any poison?"

"Sextus, for one," Galen answered.

"*Dea dia!* There you are!" said Marcia. "I tell you, Pertinax, your Sextus may prove to be another Livius! He has been as ubiquitous as the plague. He knows everything. What if he should turn around and secure himself and his estates by telling Commodus all he knows? It was you who trusted Livius. Do you never learn by your mistakes?"

"We don't know yet what Livius has told," said Pertinax. "If he had been tortured—but he was not. Commodus slew him with his own hand. I know that is true; it was told me by the steward of the bedchamber, who saw it, and who helped to dispose of the body. Commodus swore that such a creeping spy as Livius, who could be true to nobody but scribbled, scribbled, scribbled in a journal all the scandal he could learn in order to betray anybody when it suited him, was unfit to live. I take that for a sign that Commodus has had a change of heart. It was a manly thing to slay that wretch."

"He will have a change of governors of Rome before the day dawns!" Marcia retorted. "If it weren't that he might change his mistress at the same time—"

"You would betray me—eh?" Pertinax smiled at her tolerantly.

"No," said Marcia, "I would let you have your own way and be executed! You deserve it, Pertinax."

Pertinax stood up and paced the floor with hands behind him.

"I will have my own way. I will have it, Marcia!" he said, calmly, coming to a stand in front of her. "He who plots against his emperor may meet the like fate! If Commodus has no designs against me, then

I harbor none against him. I am not sure I am fitted to be Cæsar. I have none to rally to me, to rely on, except the prætorian guard, which is a two-horned weapon; they could turn on me as easily and put a man of their own choosing on the throne. And furthermore, I don't wish to be Cæsar. Glabrio, for instance, is a better man than I am for the task. I will only consent to your desperate course, for the sake of Rome, if you can prove to me that Commodus designs a wholesale massacre. And even so, if your name and Galen's and mine are not on his proscription list—if he only intends, that is, to punish Christians and weaken the faction of that Carthaginian Severus, I will observe my oath of loyalty. I will counsel moderation but—"

"You are less than half a man without your mistress!" Marcia exploded. "Don't stand trying to impress me with your dignity. I don't believe in it! I will send for Cornificia."

"No, no!" Pertinax showed instant resolution. "Cornificia shall not be dragged in. The responsibility is yours and mine. Let us not lessen our dignity by involving an innocent woman."

For a moment that made Marcia breathless. She was staggered by his innocence, not his assertion of Cornificia's—bemused by the man's ability to believe what he chose to believe, as if Cornificia had not been the very first who plotted to make him Cæsar. Cornificia more than any one had contrived to suggest to the prætorian guard that their interest might best be served some day by befriending Pertinax; she more than any one had disarmed Commodus' suspicion by complaining to him about Pertinax' lack of self-assertiveness, which had become Commodus' chief reason for not mistrusting him. By pretending to report to Commodus the private doings of Pertinax and a number of other important people, Cornificia had undermined Commodus' faith in his secret informers who might else have been dangerous.

"Your Cornificia," Marcia began—then changed her mind. Disillusionment would do no good. She must play on the man's illusion that he was the master of his own will. "Very well," she went on, "yours be the decision! No woman can decide such issues. We are all in your hands—Cornificia and Galen—all of us—aye, and Rome, too—and even Sextus and his friends. But you will never have another such opportunity. It is tonight or never, Pertinax!"

He winced. He was about to speak, but something interrupted him. The great door carved with cupids leading to the emperor's bedchamber opened inch by inch and Telamonion came out, closing it softly behind him.

"Cæsar sleeps," said the child, "and the wind blew out the lamp. He was very cross. It is dark. It is cold and lonely in there."

In his hand he held a sheet of parchment, covered with writing and creased from his attempts to make a parchment helmet.

"Show me," he said, holding out the sheet to Marcia.

She took him on her knee and began reading what was written, putting him down when he tugged at the parchment to make her show him how to fold it. She found him another sheet to play with and told him to take it to Pertinax who was a soldier and knew more about helmets. Then she went on reading, clutching at the sheet so tightly that her nails blanched white under the dye.

"Pertinax!" she said, shaking the parchment, speaking in a strained voice, "this is his final list! He has copied the names from his tablets. Whose name do you guess comes first?"

Pertinax was playing with Telamonion and did not look at her.

"Severus!" he answered, morbid jealousy, amounting to obsession, stirring that cynical hope in him.

"Severus isn't mentioned. The first six names are in this order: Galen, Marcia, Cornificia, Pertinax, Narcissus, Sextus alias Maternus. Do you realize what that means? It is now or never! Why has he put Galen first, I wonder?"

Galen did not appear startled. His interest was philosophical—impersonal.

"I should be first. I am guiltiest. I taught him in his youth," he remarked, smiling thinly. "I taught him how to loose the beast that lives in him, not intending that, of course, but it is what we do that counts. I *should* come first! The state would have been better for the death of many a man whom I have cured; but I did not cure Commodus, I revealed him to himself, and he fell in love with himself and—"

"*Now* will you poison him?" said Marcia.

"No," said Galen. "Let him kill *me.* It is better."

"Gods! Has Rome no iron left? You, Pertinax!" said Marcia. "Go in and kill him!"

Pertinax stood up and stared at her. The child Telamonion pressed close to him holding his right hand, gazing at Marcia.

"Telamonion, go in and play with Narcissus," said Marcia. She pointed at the curtains and the child obeyed.

"Go in and kill him, Pertinax!" Marcia shook the list of names, then stood still suddenly, like a woman frozen, ash-white under the carmine on her cheeks.

THERE came a voice from the emperor's bedroom, more like the roar of an angry beast than human speech:

"Marcia! Do you hear me, Marcia? By all Olympus—*Marcia!*"

She opened the door. The inner room was in darkness. There came a gust of chill wet wind that made all the curtains flutter and there was a comfortless noise of cataracts of rain downpouring from the overloaded gutters on to marble balconies. Then the emperor's voice again:

"Is that you, Marcia? You leave your Commodus to die of thirst! I parch—I have a fever—bring my wine-cup!"

"At once, Commodus."

She glanced at the golden cup on an onyx table. On a stand beside it was an unpierced wine-jar set in an enormous bowl of snow. She looked at Pertinax—and shrugged her shoulders, possibly because the wind blew through the opened door. She glanced at Galen.

"If you have a fever, shouldn't I bring Galen?"

"No!" roared Commodus. "The man might poison me! Bring me the cup, and you fill it yourself! Make haste before I die of thirst! Then bring me another lamp and close the shutters! No slaves—I can't bear the sight of them!"

"Instantly, Commodus. I am coming with it now. Only wait while I pierce the amphora."

She closed the door and looked swiftly once again at Pertinax. He frowned over the list of names and did not look at her. She walked straight up to Galen.

"Give me!" she demanded, holding out her hand.

He drew a little parchment package from his bosom and she clutched it, saying nothing. Galen was the one who spoke:

"Responsibility is his who orders. May the gods see that it falls where it belongs."

She took no notice of his speech but stood for a moment untying the strings of the package, frowning to herself, then bit the string through and, clutching the little package in her fist, took a gilded tool from beside the snow-bowl and pierced the seal of the amphora. Then she put the poison in the bottom of the golden cup and poured the wine—with difficulty, since the jar was heavy, but Pertinax, who watched intently, made no movement to assist. She stirred the wine with one of her long hair-pins.

"Marcia!" roared Commodus.

"I am coming now."

She went into the bedroom, leaving the door not quite closed behind her. Pertinax began to stare at Galen critically. Galen blinked at him. Commodus' voice came very distinctly from the inner room:

"Taste first, Marcia! Olympus! I can't see you in the dark. Come close. Are your lips wet? Let me feel them!"

"I drank a whole mouthful, Commodus. How hot your hand is! Feel—feel the cup—you can feel with your finger how much I have tasted. I broke the seal of a fresh jar of Falernian."

"Some of your Christians might have tampered with it!"

"No, no, Commodus. That jar has been in the cellar since before you were born and the seal was intact. I washed the cup myself."

"Well, taste again. Sit here on the bed where I can feel your heart-beats."

Presently he gave a gasp and belched, as always after he had swallowed a whole cupful at one draught.

"Now close the shutters and bolt them on the inside; there might be some of your Christians lurking on the balcony."

"In this storm, Commodus? And there are guards on duty."

"Close them, I say! Who trusts the guards! Did they guard the tunnel? I will rid Rome of all Christians tomorrow! Aye, and of many another reptile! They have robbed me of my fun in the arena—I will find another way to interest myself! Now bring me a fresh lamp in here, and set the tablets by the bed."

She came out, shutting the door behind her, then stood listening. She did not tremble. Her wrist was red where Commodus had held it.

"How long?" she whispered, looking at Galen.

"Only a very little time," he answered. "How much did *you* drink?"

She put her hand to her stomach, as if pain had stabbed her.

"Drink pure wine," said Galen. "Swiftly. Drink a lot of it."

She went to the amphora. Before she could reach it there came a roar like a furious beast's from the bedroom.

"I am poisoned! Marcia! *Marcia!* My belly burns! I am on fire inside! I faint! *Marcia!*—Marcia!" Then groans and a great creaking of the bed.

Marcia—she was trembling now—drank wine, and Pertinax began to pace the floor.

"You, Galen, you had better go in to him," said Marcia.

"If I do go, I must heal him," Galen answered.

The groans in the bedroom ceased. The shouts began again—terrific imprecations—curses hurled at Marcia—the struggles of a strong man in the throes of cramp—and, at last, the sound of vomiting.

"If he vomits he will not die!" Marcia exclaimed.

Galen nodded. He appeared immensely satisfied—expectant.

"Galen, have you—will that poison kill him?" Marcia demanded.

"No," said Galen. "Pertinax must kill him. I promised I would do my best for Pertinax. Behold your opportunity!"

Pertinax strode toward him, clutching at a dagger underneath his tunic.

"Kill me if you wish," said Galen, "but if you have any resolution you had better do first what you wanted me to do. And you will need me afterward."

Commodus was vomiting and in the pauses roaring like a mad beast. Marcia seized Pertinax by the arm.

"I have done my part," she said. "Now nerve yourself! Go in now and finish it!"

"He may die yet. Let us wait and see," said Pertinax.

A howl rising to a scream—terror and anger mingled—came from the bedroom; then again the noise of vomiting and the creaking of the bed as Commodus writhed in the spasms of cramp.

"He will feel better presently," said Galen.

"If so, you die first! You have betrayed us all!" Pertinax shook off Marcia and scowled at Galen, raising his right arm as if about to strike the old man. "False to your emperor! False to us!"

"And quite willing to die, if first I may see you play the man!" said Galen, blinking up at him.

"Hush!" exclaimed Marcia. "Listen! Gods! He is up off the bed! He will be in here in a minute! Pertinax!"

Alarm subsided. They could hear the thud and creak as Commodus threw himself back on the bed—then writhing again and groans of agony. Between the spasms Commodus began to frame connected sentences:

"Guards! Your emperor is being murdered! Rescue your Commodus!"

"He is recovering," said Galen.

"Give me your dagger!" said Marcia and clutched at Pertinax' tunic, feeling for it.

But she was not even strong enough to resist the half-contemptuous shrug with which Pertinax thrust her away.

"You disgust me. There is neither dignity nor decency in this," he muttered. "Nothing but evil can come of it."

"Whose was the star that fell?" asked Galen.

There came more noise from the bedroom. Commodus seemed to be trying to get to his feet again. Marcia ran toward the smaller anteroom and dragged the curtains back.

"Narcissus!"

He came out, carrying Telamonion. The child lay asleep in his arms.

"Go and put that child down. Now earn your freedom—go in and kill the emperor! He has poisoned himself, and he thinks we did it. Give him your dagger, Pertinax!"

"I am only a slave," Narcissus answered. "It is not right that a slave should kill an emperor."

Marcia seized the gladiator by the shoulders, scanned his face, saw what she looked for and bargained for it instantly:

"Your freedom! Manumission and a hundred thousand sesterces!"

"In writing!" said Narcissus.

"Dog!" growled Pertinax. "Go in and do as you are told!"

But Narcissus only grinned at him and squared his shoulders.

"Death means little to a gladiator," he remarked.

"Leave him to me!" ordered Marcia. "Go and sit down at that table, Pertinax. Take pen and parchment. Now then—what do you want in writing? Make haste!"

"Freedom—you may keep your money—I shall not wait to receive it. Freedom for me and for Sextus and for all of Sextus' friends and freedmen. An order releasing Sextus from the guard-house instantly. Permission to leave Rome and Italy by any route we choose."

"Write, Pertinax!" said Marcia.

Narcissus glanced at Galen.

"Galen," he said, "is one of Sextus' friends, so set his name down."

"Never mind me," said Galen. "They will need me."

Marcia stood over Pertinax, watching him write. She snatched the document and sanded it, then watched him write the order to the guard, releasing Sextus.

"There!" she exclaimed. "You have your price. Go in and kill him! Give him your dagger, Pertinax."

"I hoped for heroism, not expecting it," said Galen. "I expected cunning. Is it absent, too? If he should use a dagger—many men have heard me say that Cæsar has a tendency to apoplexy—"

"Strangle him!" commanded Marcia.

She thrust the palms of her hands against Narcissus' back and pushed him toward the bedroom door, now almost at the end of her reserves of self-control. Her mouth trembled. She was fighting against hysteria.

"Light! Lamp! Guards!" roared Commodus, and again the ebony-posted bed creaked under him.

Narcissus stepped into the darkened room. He left the door open, to have light to do his work by, but Marcia closed it, clinging to the gilded satyr's head that served for knob with both hands, her lips drawn tight against her teeth, her whole face tortured with anticipation.

"It is better that a gladiator did it," remarked Pertinax, attempting to look calm. "I never killed a man. As general, and as governor of Rome, as consul and proconsul, I have spared whom I might. Some had to die but—my own hands are clean."

THERE came an awful sound of struggle from the inner room. A monstrous roar was shut off suddenly, half-finished, smothered under bedclothes. Then the bed-frame cracked under the strain of Titans fighting—cracked—creaked—and utter silence fell. It lasted several minutes.

Then the door opened and Narcissus came striding out.

"He was strong," he remarked. "Look at this."

He bared his arm and showed where Commodus had gripped him; the lithe muscle looked as if it had been gripped in an iron vise. He chafed it, wincing with pain.

"Go in and observe that I have taken nothing. Don't be afraid," he added scornfully. "He fought like the god that he was, but he died—"

"Of apoplexy," Galen interrupted. "That is to say, of a surging of blood to the brain and a cerebral rupture. It is fortunate you have a doctor on the scene who knew of his liability to—"

"We must go and see," said Marcia. "Come with me, Pertinax. Then we must tidy the bed and make haste and summon the officers of the prætorian guard. Let them hear Galen say he died of apoplexy."

She picked up a lamp from the table and Pertinax moved to follow her, but Narcissus stepped in his way.

"Ave, Cæsar!" he said, throwing up his right hand.

"You may go," said Pertinax. "Go in silence. Not a word to a soul in the corridors. Leave Rome. Leave Italy. Take Sextus with you."

"You will let him go?" asked Marcia. "Pertinax, what will become of you? Send to the guard at the gate and command them to seize him! Sextus and Narcissus—"

"Have my promise!" he retorted. "If the fates intend me to be Cæsar, it shall not be said I slew the men who set me on the throne."

"You *are* Cæsar," she answered. "How long will you last? All omens favored you—the murder in the tunnel—now this storm, like a veil to act behind, and—"

"And last night a falling star!" said Galen. "Give me parchment. I will write the cause of death. Then let me go too, or else kill me. I am no more use. This is the second time that I have failed to serve the world by tutoring a Cæsar. Commodus the hero, and now you the—"

"Silence!" Marcia commanded. "Or even Pertinax may rise above his scruples! Write a death certificate at once, and go your way and follow Sextus!"

Looking About

THE older readers of our magazine know that for some eighteen years I have advocated certain principles and certain concrete aims in consonance with those principles, fighting for them in these pages during the greater part of that period. To the new readers joining us on our stepping forth for the first time into the general magazine field these principles and aims should be briefly outlined so that our new readers may know with what manner of folk they gather over the printed page. For I am not the lone advocate. Through the years our printed page has brought together thousands who stand shoulder to shoulder for these same things.

BRIEFLY, then, we hold that you can not build a sound house out of rotten bricks, nor a sound government out of rotten citizens. Whatever the form of government under which it is shaped, a nation will be rotten if its individual citizens are rotten, for they constitute the nation, create and administer the form of government, and hold in their hands the power, if they will use it, to make of both government and nation what they will.

History shows an unbroken record of nations that waxed great and decayed of their very greatness. It is not reasonable to expect that we can prove an exception, or even retard the process of decay, unless, having progressed sufficiently in the development of the world's civilization, we can bring into organized action elementary forces that are within our control but that have never hitherto been shaped into a comprehensive and decisive factor in the making and maintaining of nations.

Since the individual citizens are the nation, holding potential control of its government and of its destiny, and since, therefore, its destiny will be inexorably measured and determined by the character of the individual citizens, we have in the character of the individuals, as citizens, the fundamental factor of control. By shaping that character we can shape destiny.

Yet there is no comprehensive agency, no organized general movement, even making the attempt to shape the civic character of the American individuals in such manner that our nation may break loose from the recurring cycle of greatness and decay that history spreads before our eyes. In home, church and schools we strive to teach personal morality, but neither in these institutions fostered and protected by the state nor by any other sufficient means do we even try to teach civic morality.

THE shirking excuse that "you can't change human nature" is fatuous. The whole development of civilization is nothing else than a changing of human nature. If you can not change human nature, why, pray, do you teach your children not to lie and steal instead of letting them shape their characters from the chance contacts of the street? And if we can inculcate personal morality we can inculcate civic morality. If our schools can teach the coming generation abstract civics, ethics and philosophy, they can teach it practical, individual civic morality. Not mere flag-waving, but the full duty and obligation of the individual citizen, based upon elementary understanding of his real relation to the people of which he is a part and to the government erected by them and him.

If you demand practical proof of possibilities, consider the necessarily limited accomplishment of the American Legion, the Boy Scouts and similar agencies and the not always commendable but myriad movements to shape public opinion and action by planned propaganda for particular causes. Consider, also, Sparta, Japan, Germany and other nations whose national destiny has been plainly changed by a deliberate shaping of individual civic morality, though not by a sufficiently comprehensive or sound one.

WE ADVOCATE, then, a nation-wide, systematic, organized teaching of individual civic morality in school, church and home and by every means and method.

How go about the dangerous business of defining what shall mold the civic character of a people when, as a nation, we do not even know exactly what constitutes civic morality? But neither do we as a nation agree as to exactly what constitutes personal morality, yet this by no means keeps us from attempting to define it and to enforce our definitions, both by laws and by propaganda. That we are able in the case of personal morality to obtain results, despite our differences of ideas, is due to the fact that practically all of us agree upon certain fundamental points. In the case of civic morality there are, equally, a certain number of fundamental points upon which practically all of us agree and it is only these points that it is either safe or profitable to teach.

Without at present presenting a more general platform, we can unite, for example, upon the one point that can serve as keystone to all civic teaching—that public graft is an infinitely more serious crime against the community and the people than is theft from a single individual. For graft is not only treason as much as is betrayal of the country in time of war but it undermines the entire machinery upon which we are dependent for protection against individual thefts and against individual crimes and injustices of all kinds. Even if the platform were not enlarged beyond this single plank a comparatively adequate campaign could be based on the single war-cry "Down with Graft!"

EIGHTEEN years ago the American public saw no particular reason for reforming itself. After the first shock of muck-raking revelations it settled back into the habit of attempting to remedy specific evils by passing specific laws, or of not attempting to remedy them. So far as my observation extended, no one even suggested any such fundamental, educational remedy as that outlined above, and when, a few years later, I advocated it in print I was for the most part labeled idealistic but harmless.

Things have changed. The pressure of internal and external problems, growing more and more acute, now forces us to recognize our dangers and to seek safety against them. We have begun to realize that the mere passing of laws does not reach to the heart of national troubles and that, change policies and governing machinery as we will, there is something back of all those things that remains untouched and unremedied. One by one public men from President Coolidge down are raising their voices to urge a remedy that reaches to this something. They call the something by various names but in each case it analyzes down to the civic morality of the American people.

That is the something to be reached and bettered. Mere exhortation from individuals, however exalted, can not change it greatly or in time. Only organized effort can change it.

We are fighting to bring that organized effort into being. If you are a good American, not a parasite and yourself a liability upon your country, join us in the fight.

* * *

WITH this issue *Adventure* appears in its new clothes and with various improvements, external and internal. In the nature of the case we couldn't get our readers' opinions in advance on every point in any such transformation, but for most of the changes we've had their approval for some time past. As older readers know, we keep a careful record of every voluntary comment from any reader on the authors, stories and types of stories he likes or dislikes, and every comment or suggestion on any phase of our magazine is carefully noted either in our minds or in written record.

This custom grew out of the friendly relationship that has grown up among readers, writers and editors and become a thing unique in the magazine field. It's one of the reasons readers speak of *Adventure* as "our" magazine. It is just that, for they help in making and shaping it.

We in the office encouraged and helped build up this feeling and custom, this habit of criticism and advice from our readers. Why? Well, because we're sort of built that way. Can't see anything in this more or less persistent idea that editors are a race of beings with superior intellect and all that kind of thing. There's plenty of stiffness and formality and coldness in the world without adding to it and it's a lot more comfortable to be friendly and human. As to dignity, well, if we can't earn the respect of others and ourselves we don't want any of the kind of respect or dignity that can easily be gathered by putting on a high hat and getting upstage.

BUT there's also an entirely selfish and cold business reason for our doing all we can to encourage comment and criticism from our readers. It's very simple. The primary object of this magazine is to make money. We can make most money by pleasing as many readers as possible. We can't please them unless we know what they like. They are the only ones who know what they like. Therefore we want them to tell us. When they tell us, we'll get it for them if we can. It pays us to do so.

Fortunately business reasons and our own inclinations run hand in hand on this point, and naturally the readers as well as ourselves profit from this arrangement, so everything is all right. This is all old hearing to our old readers, but I want our new readers to understand just as thoroughly as do our old ones that of course we want all the criticism and suggestions we can get on each and every feature of the magazine. Many will recognize among the improvements the embodiment of suggestions they themselves have made. Good paper, unglazed, for example, and a greater development of our service departments. But there will be difference of opinion about other points—even about these, for that matter, and we want to know the majority opinion on every possible point. Our job is to give you just the kind of magazine you'd like best, but you'll have to tell us what that is.

We hand you herewith what your past suggestions indicate is the kind of magazine you want. If we can make it still more what you want, tell us.

NATURALLY a magazine is glad to have new readers. It pays. But when the new readers now joining us have had time to get better acquainted they will realize that in this case there is something besides the question of quarters and dollars. I shall not attempt to state it in words, for the average American or Canadian is too canny to put much faith in words from one who is interested in selling him something. Instead, I'll leave you to be the judges of whether there has not grown up around this magazine a general feeling of human friendliness among all those in any way having to do with it.

In the meantime, may I offer you a hearty welcome from our older readers as well as from us in the office? You will, I hope, you who are joining us at the very beginning of our magazine's real development, become in your turn our older readers, pioneers of this new era in our growth, to be in turn referred to as "old-timers." But until you do, and whether you do or not, be sure that while you are with us at all you are among friends.

LET us have a tempest in a teapot. That there should be any need to defend "The Way of Sinners" against a charge of even seeming immorality will be difficult for most of you who read the story to believe. But our magazine has built up a reputation for cleanness, particularly in matters of sex, by scrupulous care as to both the spirit and the letter of its fiction. That reputation entails obligations. We are glad to be known as a magazine any member of the family can read without worry on the part of any other member, but the set policy of cleanness brings its problems. There is, for example, our custom of using a dash instead of an oath. For obvious reason this is not satisfactory to some readers, nor is it to me, yet after years of testing it seems the best way to handle the problem for this particular magazine. We can talk that over more fully another time, but the more difficult question involved in "The Way of Sinners" should be met now.

IT IS the old one of letter *versus* spirit. The spirit of the story needs no single word in its defense. The tale is wholesome in conception, clean in execution, very much the opposite of lowering in its influence. Even in its letter it needs no defense if judged by the standards applied to the magazines admitted unquestioned to our homes. But we have striven so doggedly to avoid even the appearance of anything unclean that many readers naturally expect from us no variation whatever from that rigid policy, not even variations that seem to us personally of no importance whatever.

There was, for example, great outcry from a few when for the first time in years one of our stories, like the Bible, contained the perfectly good English word "whore." It contained it because no other word, no circumlocution, could have been used in that place without distinct injury to the story. The same word, it happens, occurs in the present story and is retained for exactly the same reason. Judge for yourself when you meet it.

As to any intrinsic uncleanness in printing the word. I can see none myself, but out of respect for those who sincerely believe good morals are best furthered by ignoring the evil facts of life this magazine avoids it when possible.

For the rest, among the many threads that make the story are a few involving sex. They are inseparable from any lifelike picture of its period and setting, necessary to the development of its theme. Any one who reads with expectation of salacious enjoyment therefrom will be disappointed. Yet, in deference to those readers who hold that a mere mention of evil is uncleanness I feel bound to state in advance that there is such mention. It is part of that story's adventurous history that we once rejected it solely out of deference to their feelings in such matters. Later we asked for another opportunity to buy it—out of deference to those other readers who would enjoy the story and be neither smutted nor worried by anything in it from first to last. It seemed to us in the office, if you will forgive this praise of our own wares, much too good to lose.

From those of the stricter point of view the rest of us ask and expect, in this and in all other cases, the respect and tolerance for our point of view that we habitually accord to theirs.

SO MUCH for the particular case, but back of it is the general problem. *Adventure* tries to keep its fiction clean and wholesome, not only as to sex but as to morals and ethics in general. No one in all its years has ever accused our magazine of being namby-pamby but there is, unfortunately, no doubt that in this day and age any general magazine that openly limits itself to clean fiction is neglecting one of the surest paths to popular favor. Nevertheless *Adventure* will continue to neglect that path.

There is no self-righteousness in my determination to keep it off that path. There is not even any hypocrisy. Frankly, I hold it to a much higher moral standard than my own personal one, said personal one being nothing to boast about.

It's this way. We're all likely to lose sight of the fact, but one of the biggest shapers of a people's morals is the fiction it reads. If you doubt it, analyze yourself carefully and see how many of your standards were shaped, perhaps unconsciously at the time, by the fiction you read, particularly in your youth. For fiction brings us our chief vision of life beyond our own experience and is very largely our interpreter and explainer of both the world we know and of the world we have not yet come to know.

Fiction, the drama, motion-pictures, the radio, here is a mighty molder of standards and ideals. Name me two or three more potent if you can.

Now one's own morals, my own for example, are to at least some extent one's own affair and, except for the few of whom I am not one, of only minute importance to the nation as a whole. But how about the individual, however unimportant in himself, who chances to be the one with responsibility for largely determining the moral quality and influence of the fiction a magazine feeds out year after year to hundreds of thousands of people? His own personal morals remain unimportant, but the morals of the fiction he allows to pour out on the country—how about them?

I'VE spent most of my life in the magazine game. I'm no longer much impressed by editors, including myself; what in my cub days seemed serious responsibilities routine has proved no more momentous than those regularly shouldered by all other people. But one responsibility only looms bigger every year—in common decency an editor must not send out through a magazine the kind of fiction that helps dry-rot the morals of a nation.

What dry-rots and what does not? How can he, from his personal standards, decide on proper standards for the people as a whole? He can't. He can only try hard, make his mistakes, acknowledge them when he sees them, rectify them if he can. Even that modest accomplishment is not easy. In my attempt toward it I want your full understanding of the issue so that you will be tolerant of my efforts and read into them nothing of the holier-than-thou. I'm not holy at all, but I'm not a pimp.

A. S. H.

A *free-to-all* Meeting-Place

The Camp

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship

THERE is the other side of the question, from one who should know whereof he speaks. The ladies will, I think, listen with particular attention. I wish this letter had been drawn out of our cache when the matter first came up for discussion.

Orlando, Florida.

I notice in "Camp-Fire" a letter about the "horrible" cruelty of trapping wild animals. Now I have been a trapper and still am when I can find anything worth while to trap and I do not believe there is any more suffering on the average trap-line than there is in the average slaughter-house.

I HAVE had my fingers in traps up to a No. 3 Newhouse (the largest I use) and have not experienced any great suffering. The experienced trapper for a perfectly obvious reason uses the lightest possible trap adapted to his animal. Something designed merely to hold, not to break bones.

Again, at least four-fifths of the water animals are drowned at once when they are caught. Any trapper knows the necessity of so placing his trap as to accomplish this. Also this accounts for about one-half of the 100,000,000 pelts mentioned.

As a trapper of some few years' experience (about 50) I say there are no "good traps that kill." I have tried 'em and in a line of 150 traps might use four or five.

The fur farmer seems to be doing pretty well as it is, but very likely he would like to see trapping stopped, as his market would be somewhat better.

Finally, practically all of the fur-bearers are predatory animals. In several States bounties are paid on some of them. In a farming section any large increase in their numbers would be a menace both to stock and crops.

They are nearly all destructive to game birds and animals and to the undesirable kinds of wild life. I note one exception, the skunk. He is mainly insectivorous and therefore beneficial.

If any one suggests poison instead of traps I will say that the poisoner is several degrees the lowest thing that runs the woods.—E. G. ROGERS.

for Readers, Writers *and* Adventurers

Fire

has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ONE of our serials brought the matter to the fore, one of our writers' brigade and another Camp-Fire comrade want additional information, and the additional information is wanted for the Congressional Library, so I know Camp-Fire will be more than usually willing to bring forward anything it can. And, if it runs true to form, it will sooner or later bring up to the light of our blaze just what has been asked for.

Certainly after what Camp-Fire has done for American folk-song it should be able to accomplish something along this similar line. If we could collect, for example, more than thirty versions of one song in addition to the total of ten or eleven that all other agencies had been able to collect, we ought to bring forth the desired information concerning the Deguello and its history.

Norway, Maine.

Mr. W. R. Whittlesey, acting chief of Music Division, Library of Congress, has written me concerning the "Deguello," featured somewhat in the conclusion of "The Border Breed." He informs me that in 1919 Mr. Samuel E. Ashbury of College Station, Texas, presented the Library with some Mexican bugle calls, "among which appeared two strains of the 'Deguello'." He states that he was informed that this call is still used in the revolutionary armies of Mexico, that it dates back to the wars against the Moors in Spain, and that it took its origin from the liturgy service of the Spanish Church.

Mr. Whittlesey asked if I could supply further information. Beyond what I had used in my story, plus certain references accessible probably to any one having access to the Library, but out of my reach, I could give no information. As Mr. Whittlesey is a member of Camp-Fire, I urged we appeal to the circle. He gave permission to quote from his letter and sent me a photostat of the strains in "Deguello" which are used for bugle-calls.

To me it is very interesting to trace back this particular tune. Played by Santa Anna's bands at the Alamo as a sign for no quarter, before that played during the wars of Moor and Spaniard, farther back figuring in the Spanish church liturgy, and in recent times used by Mexican revolutionists, it appealed to me as wrapped in much history. If any of the Camp-Fire circle can contribute any further information, not only will Mr. Whittlesey and I be much pleased, but it will be of interest to many others. Such information can be sent to Mr. Whittlesey or Mr. Hoffman, or to me. The results would be printed in "Camp-Fire" in any event. All I could think of and see when trying out the photostat was the East, Crusaders and an Oriental origin.—PENDEXTER.

SOMETHING from Arthur O. Friel in connection with his story in this issue. If, perhaps, the ogre of his tale seems overdrawn, read the chapter on Tomas Funes, the bandit of real life, in Mr. Friel's "The River of Seven Stars" (Harper & Brothers), the account of his own single-handed exploration of the Orinoco and its tributary the Ventuari in 1922.

THERE is a queer bit of country off to the east of the hamlet of Atures, halfway up the Orinoco; mountains where live Indians virtually unknown, as well as the Piaroas, some of whom used to come down to the pueblo now and then to trade for salt and fishhooks and such stuff. After the habitual killing by the Funes gang had gotten well under way, though, the back-bush folk ceased making such visits, for most excellent reasons. Only the aborigines still unaware of what was going on at the settlement came down after that; and they either went back in haste or wished they had. I am letting *Sixto Scott* spin you the yarn of one young couple who did come down, and of what happened afterward.

KNOWING that some of you may feel inclined to arise and dispute *Sixto's* assertion that white men have eaten Indians down there—even when they didn't have to—I quote you the following excerpt from the authoritative book "*Venezuela,*" by Leonard V. Dalton, F. R. G. S., etc.:

"Making a permanent camp in the country to the west of the Lake of Maracaibo, after founding the city of that name in 1529, he (Ambrosius Alfinger, first governor of the country which is now Venezuela) sent a party of Spaniards and Germans to Coro for fresh supplies and reinforcements. The party lost themselves in the forest-clad mountains at the south end of the lake, and in their privations some of the members turned cannibals, killing and eating their Indian servants. Apparently the taste for human flesh, once acquired, was not easily overcome, for the survivors, when given food by some Indians on the banks of the Chama, fell upon their benefactors and devoured them! The few that reached Coro found that Alfinger had been killed in his camp in 1531, and his expedition had accomplished nothing beyond outraging the Indians."

So that's that. And again, later in the same volume:

"The members of these tribes (about thirty Carib tribes named by the author) were those who, like the Goajiros, fought most stoutly for their independence when they saw it menaced by the Conquistadores. These patriots, superior in many respects to their foes, were characterised by the European invaders as cannibals, vicious and degraded. . . . In reality they were then what they still are, where unspoilt by 'civilization,' a fine race physically, brave and intelligent, possessing, no doubt, the vices of savagery, but also its virtues. The charges of cannibalism brought by the European exploiters of the New World—who had the vices of civilization and barbarism combined, without the virtues of either—were either entirely baseless or due to the ignorance which mistook the limbs of monkeys, which the Indians were always accustomed to eat, for those of men."

All of which may tend to corroborate the statements of *Sixto Scott* and Arthur Friel, both of whom have had some experience with the "wild" Venezuelan Indian and found him a very decent *hombre* when treated right.

A WORD about the drug used by Matá. Although I make no attempt to identify this in the story, I believe it to be the same concoction used for the same purpose in the Napo region of the upper Amazon, where it is called *floripondio.* Concerning this stuff I can best quote the following scientific note by Prof. James Orton, who, some sixty years ago, conducted an expedition through Ecuador for the Smithsonian Institution and who later lost his life at Lake Titicaca in Peru:

"Some of these feminines . . . render their husbands idiotic by giving them an infusion of *floripondio*, and then choose another consort. We saw a sad example of this near Riobamba, and heard of one husband who, after being thus treated, unconsciously served his wife and her new man like a slave. *Floripondio* is the seed of the *Datura sanguinea,* which is allied to the poisonous *stramonium* used by the priests of Apollo at Delphi to produce their frantic ravings."

Whether or not the drug used farther north is the same, the effect is identical. I have repeatedly heard of its use by women in Venezuela, Colombia and the Guianas. While knocking about among the Antilles, too, I have been warned by residents of certain islands not to drink anything whatever, even water, offered me by a native woman. Thereabouts the dope makes a man not merely idiotic but downright insane. I myself saw a white man, soon after boarding ship at one of the islands, suddenly lose his reason and throw himself overboard. He was rescued, confined until the next port was reached, and there taken ashore by the harbor police and kept in a madhouse for three weeks. Some time later I unexpectedly met him, perfectly normal once more, on his own island, and had to tell him all about his actions aboard ship. He remembered nothing of his seizure or the subsequent events. But he did remember, and kept repeating, "They gave me something to drink." Who "they" were he wouldn't say, but I judged it to be a "she."

Personally I'm pretty wary about both my drinks and my eats when traveling down South—and wary of women almost anywhere—A. O. F.

REACHING into our Camp-Fire letter cache, the following, written in 1924, from Dr. John I. Cochrane of our writers' brigade, comes to the light of the blaze. Some question had arisen as to the exact effect of a silencer, used in a fiction story, and Dr. Cochrane appealed to authority and got the facts:

East Dorset, Vermont.

I am writing to pass on the information given me by Hiram Maxim, anent the silencer.

IT CAN be put on a revolver, but it does not silence the noise that escapes between the cylinder and barrel, hence it is not effective. It does, however, silence such noise as is due to the outburst at the barrel-end, and there is no obscure action or failure to act due to lessened pressure in the barrel. It operates to slow up the escape of the exploding gases, just like a muffler on a motor-engine exhaust—*tout simplement.*

It can be, and is, used on an automatic pistol of the Reising or Lüger type where the barrel does not slide and the breech does not leak.

As to its use in fiction, we have learned this, then: A revolver would make too much noise even with a silencer properly attached, which is not in itself an impossibility—simply useless. Any short weapon without a revolving cylinder can be used, more or less noiselessly, with a silencer. I say more or less because Mr. Maxim points out that the mechanism of the automatic's breech-action makes a considerable noise in itself—either automatic rifle or pistol. Also there is a noise, more or less sharp, caused by the flight of a *high-velocity* bullet, a crack called the "flight noise," which is not noticeable unless there are solid objects near by to reflect the sound to the shooter. For instance, if you shoot a high-power rifle along a row of telegraph poles you will hear only the grunt of the report, but it will be followed by a *rattle* of flight-noises reflected by the poles and arriving in succession due to time used in transmission. 'S all I know about silencers.—COCHRANE.

THERE was a time when I really knew something about the history of ancient Ireland. Nowadays I'm rather hazy on it, but from what I can recall I have an idea that Comrade McNeill is going to bring down upon his head a deluge of argument. Me, I'm standing to one side. That is, as much to one side as my quota of Irish blood will permit.

Cincinnati, Ohio.

In the issue of May 23 is a story entitled "The Bleeding Hand of Ulster," by John Dorman. On page 184, in an editorial, you invite further information, and Mr. Dorman's letter on the same page very modestly joins in the request, with the admission that he is uncertain as to the accuracy of the legend and that he has not seen it in print.

I venture to send *Adventure* the enclosed which is not intended to enter into any discussion of his story or the form of the legend which he put into it, but to give what I believe may safely be accepted as an outline of the original.

Not every Irishman, nor even every MacNeill, is familiar with this story (and by the way the Mc or Mac Neills have been Scotch for about 700 years more than Irish), but I think those who are familiar with it will adjudge the enclosed a fair statement of it.

THE BLOODY HAND OF MACNEILL

THE royal house of Neal, Neill, etc. (there is great variety of spelling), was the only real dynasty in the history of United Ireland.

When the rest of the world first learned of this island it was divided into some twenty-odd (or even) petty kingdoms which were in more or less continuous war among themselves, or resting up from the last war, or getting ready for the next. These kingdoms were little more than tribes, the originals perhaps of some of the later clans. The kings were mere chiefs, comparable to the sachems of American tribes at the time of the discovery. To be a king in Ireland in those days was less important than to be mayor of most any good small city such as Kokomo or Kalamazoo.

At this time there was in Spain a school-teacher named Niul, born in Scythia. The name is sometimes spelled Nial, but either way it was probably pronounced about as Neal and Neil are now. This was in the fourth century.

The story of the "Bloody Hand of MacNeill" as I first read it is about as follows:

NIUL had three sons who, on learning of Ireland, decided on organizing an expedition for its conquest. Before setting out on their great and perilous adventure they visited a soothsayer, who assured them that their expedition would be a success and foretold that the one of them who first touched Ireland would become a king.

Of the voyage and any possible storms or hardships at sea we are uninformed, but it seems they all three reached their destination at the same time; so we are permitted to assume that they had fair sailing.

When they were nearing shore, one of them, seeing that one of the others was about to land and thus be first, drew his sword, laid his hand on the gunwale of the boat, chopped it off and threw it, so that *he touched* Ireland first.

And it is said that he truly became a king in Ireland!

One would feel constrained to admire the clairvoyant foresight of the soothsayer or seer were it not for the fact that according to history they all three became kings. The legend in some of its forms goes so far as to give the names of the three men. I do not know that the one of the bloody hand is designated by name. It seems to me now that he wasted a perfectly good hand. He could have been a king anyhow. At any rate his brothers paid no such price for their thrones.

UNDER these men and their successors all Ireland was subjugated. Later it was divided into two kingdoms ruled over by the North Hy Neills and the South Hy Neills. That may account for the fact that the Mac Neills and their septs have two coats of arms or crests.

The North Hy Neills and the South Hy Neills were often at war with each other, so that one may see in that the beginning of the division that continues "even unto this day," though now the assigned reasons are of a political and religious character and are of later date.

IN THE ninth century Ireland was united into one kingdom and thus took its place among the nations of the world. This was under a king who has been known since in Irish history as Neill the Great. After his death, his son on ascending the throne took the name of MacNeill. Mac or Mack in Gaelic meaning "son." He wished his name to be a reminder that he was the son of Ireland's first great king. At his death his son, ascending the throne, took the name O'Neill. The Gaelic Au, Auh, and other spellings, means "grandson" or "descendant" and was again a reminder of the great king. By such little things do kings sometimes think to make their thrones secure or themselves more popular. It was thus the names MacNeill and O'Neill originated.

The house of Neill continued to be the royal house until the twelfth century when at the close of a well-organized rebellion the royal family and many of their adherents escaped to Scotland, where they established themselves on various islands of the Hebrides. Perhaps some of them went farther, to Norway and Denmark, and there became the progenitors of the Neilsons, Nilsons, Nelsons, etc. It is said that united Ireland had but one king after the house of Neill was driven out.

THE expression "the bloody hand of MacNeill" will be encountered occasionally in literature and comes with it no intimation of reproach or guilt but merely signifies a grim determination such as is seen in the motto inscribed in their crests, "Vincere vel Mori," "Conquer or Die."

After the English conquest of Ireland there were various rebellions and uprisings in which the leaders would occasionally designate some one as "The MacNeill," meaning that he was accepted as the heir to the throne in case they should be successful, and doubtless in the hope that he might gain help from the Hebrides Islands and might rally to the support of their arms all those who still fondly remembered the glories of the house that furnished Ireland her kings for over eight hundred years.

The "bloody hand" was painted on their banners and was an emblem of nationalist hopes, a symbol of their determination.

Why the hand is pictured all red, like a red glove, and not a dripping hand, I do not know, but suppose one who is well versed in heraldry could explain it.

CHARLES GRANT MACNEILL.

HERE are some chapters to add to our serial story of strange places in which individual copies of our magazine have been found and of adventures they have had in various parts of the world. Also still another reply to another comrade's inquiry concerning Didier Masson's flight off Guayamas. The Camp-Fire comrades thread their way into pretty well every nook and cranny of the earth's far places and their "news service" functions where all others fail.

The following letter, drawn from our cache, dates back to August, 1925:

Navy Yard, Bremerton, Washington.

Maybe *Adventure* has the edge on any other magazine of its kind in this respect: two copies each of November and December and one of January, 1920 and 1921, made the flight from San Diego to Panama in my plane F-5-L No. 15, Ensign Roberts First Pilot, and Chief Radioman Alexander Second Pilot. I was just a brass-pounder on the plane.

An October number went up and was read by me at an altitude of three miles on a test hop in this same plane. That was in 1920.

While we were in Cocosolo, C. Z., several of us made a trip inland and to the south to a small native village. Here we found an antiquated copy, containing an Amazon story by Friel, being read by an educated native. He got an awful kick out of it too. Claimed he was going to get a button and identification card also. Don't know whether he did or not. That's what I call reading *Adventure* on the very edge of adventure itself.

I happened to be in the submarine H-3 which was wrecked on the beach at Eureka in December, 1916. There were twelve of us caught in the torpedo compartment separated from the handling room by the forward battery compartment which was in flames and full of gas. With us in the "coffin" was a copy of the November issue of *Adventure*, 1916. If I am not mistaken we were reading a story by Tuttle and his piperock scenes. Then we went "out." Gas and no air, you know.

By the way, I did not see this "ace" Masson do his stuff over Guayamas in '13, but I have pictures of his plane. I was in Guayamas in the *U. S. S. Albany* in '14. Would certainly have liked to see him do battle. Masson should have seen the battle between the *Guerrero* and the *Tampico* off the Farallone Islands just out of Topolobampo, Mex.

We saw every big battle that was pulled off in '14 by the Rebs and Federals. Had to follow the *Guerrero* around and keep her safe for Democracy.

The soldiers had it pretty tough in the trenches but they should be tickled to death that the Boche didn't trice them up to a convenient limb to "dry." That's what they did with a bunch of the Rebs at Empalme, Mex., and also at Mazatlan, Mex., in '14.

Well, I guess I have raved long enuff. All I wanted to do was ask for a card, but when I get the "mill" started it just won't stop.—DUANE F. STEWART, Chief Radioman, United States Fleet, Destroyer Squadrons, Battle Fleet, *U. S. S. Henshaw.*

ANOTHER little chapter in the adventures of individual copies of our magazine and another example of the many years old custom of leaving or keeping copies in isolated places where they will be doubly welcome to some other wandering comrade:

Rome, Georgia.

The first copy I ever read I found in a camp in Nova Scotia, in 1919. It showed signs of being quite old then. It was the copy with Talbot Mundy's story, "Barabbas Island." When I was last at the camp, three years later, it was still there, though badly bunged up.—M. A. COOPER.

HERE is another angle in our discussion about the Danube. You'll remember that Negley Farson of our writers' brigade negotiated most of that river in a small motorboat and in writing us about his trip accused it of more or less unnavigability. Mr. Necker, who knew the Danube as a boy, took exception.

I have had no word from Mr. Farson since he wrote that he was about to undergo still another operation on the leg injured during his service on the Russian front. I hope no news is good news but definite assurance would be still better news.

Washington, D. C.

Anent Negley Farson's statements as to the navigability of the Danube, and Mr. John H. Necker's comments thereon, I am enclosing herewith a clipping from the Washington *Herald*, dated April 26th, which to my mind adds very much to the interest of the subject and makes it appear that both Farson and Necker overlooked something.—W. J. Neeve.

Bucharest, April 25.—The European Danube Commission, formed by England, France and Italy in 1857 to keep that river navigable, may become nationalized as the result of complaints that it is failing to carry out its charge at the present time. A movement now on foot appears to have official sanction.

The duty of the commission was to facilitate the movement of shipping by keeping the mouth of the Danube properly dredged at all times of the sand that piles up there. It is claimed that a bar has been allowed to form which has imprisoned loaded ships for some months.

ANOTHER letter drawn from our Camp-Fire cache after lying there two years. It dates back to the time when "one of you" complained that my use at Camp-Fire of the quoted phrase sounded condescending. It was and is used, of course, merely to distinguish the main body of Camp-Fire from its very few comrades who happen to work in the office of its magazine. It would, for example, be rather unclear to say "One of us sent us a letter asking us, etc." or "One of us feels that our magazine should publish, etc." Even as it is, it's awkward enough when I have to say "We here in the office are, etc."

Anyhow, there isn't even a chemist's trace of condescension in the phrase and this comrade was one of the many who made it clear that Camp-Fire in general wasn't worried by it:

Brigade Signal Company, 1st. Brigade,
U. S. M. C.
Port au Prince, Haiti.

In reply to your request for opinions of the use of the phrase "one of you" as articulated in the August 30, 1924, number.

A CLUB is something that I have never had the pleasure of belonging to, due, most likely, to my roaming life in part and partly to my natural disposition to seclusion. At any rate my view of Camp-Fire is that it is one big Club that has the most wonderful membership in the world.

Would any member of any other clubs that you belong to feel that you were condescending were you to speak of him "as one of you"? If any slight has been done, it has been that you were slighting yourself by not saying "one of us" rather than "one of you." Personally, should any of my letters ever reach "Camp-Fire," I should feel myself honored to have any letter introduced by the use of the phrase.

Of course this all may mean nothing in the eyes of your correspondent as I am only a Quartermaster Sergeant in the Marine Corps, but I am a white man and believe in the old doctrine of "So live your life each day that you may look any —— man in the face and tell him to go to ——."—Henry W. Weinhold.

SOMETHING more about square-riggers and their number of masts:

Detroit, Michigan.

I worked in Port Talbot, Wales, 1911-1914, remember these German windjammers well, and have often seen them passing Mumbles Lighthouse, spreading their canvas as they headed S. W. for the Cornish coast, outward bound.

They were five-masters, square-rigged of course. I used to hear the names of the masts thrashed out (which is the main mast of a five-master). They were painted the slate gray of the German Navy, and disappeared like wraiths in the mist, and were named *Hebe*, *Europa*, *Asie*, *Preussen*, *Potosi*. Net tonnage about 3200; carrying capacity 10,500 tons. They did the round trip in three months, Hamburg to Port Talbot or Swansea, to Rio, with coal, and back to Hamburg. Mighty good work. Kebble Chatterton in his book "Sailing Ships and their Story" makes mention of this fleet. The crew was of some eighty souls, including 30 cadets—heel-clicking and all the rest of it.

There were also a number of French vessels—the *Almendral*, a fine four-master, besides a number of three-masters. I believe I have in Winnipeg the negatives of some of these vessels, taken as they lay under the coal staiths at P. T.

I do not know if there are many of your readers have the pleasure of owning a "ship in a bottle." I got mine some thirty years ago. The model is some eight inches long, the masts are fully 2½ inches high and the neck is less than 1¼. Nice bit of work drawing up the masts and then using the hot wire to burn off the threads. The model is one of the *Inver* of Aberdeen, Scotland, under full sail, stun'sails and jibs. Needless to say every kid that has seen it hollers for the title of ownership, but in that way I am as big a kid as any.—Chas. W. Beresford.

FROM out of our Camp-Fire cache is drawn this letter dated back in May, 1924, written to Edgar Young of our "Ask Adventure" staff and passed on to the rest of us in friendly fashion by the writer through Mr. Young.

As you will gather from the first paragraph Mr. Vernon applied to Mr. Young for first-hand data on Ecuador before taking a look-see at the back country. Like so many others who turn to "A. A." for information before adventuring or homesteading, he reports back after the event. This not only keeps the "A. A." man in intimate, up-to-date touch with conditions in his special territory and is thus of practical benefit to us all, but also strengthens the relations among us and helps spread the comradely spirit of Camp-Fire.

Guayaquil, Ecuador.

DEAR MR. YOUNG: It is somewhere around 18 months I think since I wrote asking for information regarding this country. Anyway, soon after writing you, I landed here (Guayaquil), gave this city a thorough whirl, then went to the Galapagos Islands. Stayed ten weeks there (Hood and Cristobal). Would not have stayed 10 days if I could have got away. The most important island (San Cristobal) is used as a penal colony by Ecuador. A guy named Alvarado, having large cane and coffee plantations and a sugar factory, draws all the prisoners. He is a surly duck and I expect that, like his father-in-law from whom he inherited the property, he will eventually get his. The father-in-law, M. T. Cobos, was killed by some of the prisoners who afterward took the island schooner and, not being any navigator among the bunch, the currents took them to Colombia, where they were all gathered in by the authorities.

AFTER getting back to G. Is. I took the inland route to Vinces-el Carmen and Balzar; from Balzar a 17-hours' canoe trip to Mas Agua; then mule again to Calceta, 8 days in Calceta, then mule to Chone. After 7 days in Chone, got mules and 2 Spigs with intention of drifting up into Esmeraldas. On the 8th day out the Spigs refused to go any further, claiming we were two days beyond the place where any one had ever been before—to their knowledge, that the country was said to be infested with savages, etc. All persuasion and threats having no effect, we had to return, but if the horses had not been two days back, we would have gone ahead. Returned to Chone, stayed 3 weeks and back to Guayaquil by way of Bahia. After resting up 5 weeks went to Huigra on G. and Q. R. R.; mules to Tambo, Azoques, Cuenca. Stayed in Cuenca 8 days. Mules to Ludo, Rosario and Huallaquizi. Only one house and R. C. mission in Huallaquizi.

MET lots of Jivaros here. Arrived Saturday evening before Christmas. Jivaros with their families came from all directions to see me. The women wanted to examine my teeth (4 gold bridge) and I had to stand around for one-half hour while each woman gave them the once over. It got pretty tiresome and for the last few minutes they had to help themselves. With one hand a squaw would grab my chin and with the other my snoot. Just like a bunch of yaps at a horse fair. The women have a piece of bamboo about the size of a lead pencil, 5 inches long, sticking straight out from the lower lip. It is fastened inside with a sliver. The little girls have the same layout on a smaller scale.

The men have the same racket through the ear lobes, but about 9 inches long, in which they keep little trinkets—for weapons. They have the blowgun, spears and a few have old Spanish muzzleloaders, but have not seen any powder among them, which may be a good thing for the Jiv, as I would rather be shot at by any of the guns I have seen than fire one. For clothing, they generally go naked, but when in full dress they have a piece of cloth from waist to knee, folded once around.

MY TWO years as medical student in U. S. was a great asset to me. Have been in parts of their country where it is certain death for a Spig (this on the assurance of the Jivaros). Stayed with them 4 months, made a great hit with them, had a hard time getting away. Showed them medicine was all used and must have more; promised them I would return in August. And I am sure going back.

The women chew yucca for chicha, spitting it into a large bowl. I suppose you know the method. They can't understand why I always turn it down. Among other things, they eat toasted frogs, broiled fish, crabs. There are big soft-shelled fellows over there, wild hogs, turkeys, chicken, peafowl, parrots, monks. There are lots of deer, but for some reason the Jivaros will not eat venison—so far. I have not been able to learn the reason why.

THEY go in for necklaces and bracelets of beads and feathers. Also there are a few headdresses of the orange, black and scarlet feathers of some of these gaudy birds the names of which I do not know in English or Spanish, but do in Jiv. Women have their hair bobbed like a flapper, but also wear the old-time fringe across the forehead coming down to the eyes. Men wear the hair about 14 inches long, twisting it into one strand, wrap fine fiber tightly from end to 3 or 4 inches up, then bring the tail across the forehead and fasten it on the left side of the head with a home-made bamboo comb. They for the most part are a pleasant featured bunch and nothing at all like some pictures I have seen lately in a New York newspaper.

They have not got many shrunken heads, but offered me 5 and promised to get more for me. They claim the main bunch along the Amazon have lots of them. It is punishable by a heavy fine in this Rep. to have one or more heads in one's possession and, as I did not have any use for them anyway, declined the offer.

THE women also do most of the painting, always on the face and never on the bodies. Men rarely on the face but almost all paint symbols on the chest. They also take their names from animals and birds as ours in U. S.

Took a lot of pictures of them, but coming back through the clouds among the Andes all films were spoiled. Will take developer along next time and may have better luck. I remember you said in *Adventure* the hike from Riombamba to Napo was a —— of a trip, but I'll tell the world the trip from Cuenca to Huallaquizi is several hells. I'll bet the wild west movie stunt people have nothing on me—and I only took one header and that was when my saddle slid over the head of the mule.

Have you heard —— in the Napo country has gone native?

While seeking information two weeks ago regarding the land laws, the Governor called me into his office and had his secretary read me the whole works. Before we were through, old man Tamayo (the President), 1 colonel, 3 majors, 2 captains and 3 lieutenants came in. I thought it was all off with me for a minute. I had a 15-minute private chat with the old scout regarding the Oriente. He thinks I am a wonder because I got out alive. These Spigs sure are an ignorant mob. Tamayo retires on the 10th of August, Cordova is president elect, which reminds me—

THREE months ago while in Panama I wrote to Bannerman's Sons, New York, asking about a U. S. Army model, .30 cal. rifle. Their answer was forwarded to me here. As the P. O. will not ship ammunition, I am to send prepaid express charges before they can ship. I immediately wrote to them for full charges for rifle, amm. P. P. and Ex. Am expecting answer any day. When I know the charges will immediately send draft on N. Y. for full amount.

There will be a change of administration here on August 10th and at present rifles are not for sale here. I have gone through all the forms and have a permit to import said rifle, signed by the Gov. and the Intendente General and hate to have to go through all of it again. I wonder if you would kindly call up Bannerman's and ask them to rush this order as soon as they get my draft and to be sure to send the correct size of ammunition for same.

I know it is presuming to beat —— and do not blame you if you refuse. The *Mantaro* leaves for Panama pretty soon, so I had better cut it short. If you can sort out anything from this scramble (which is just a short account of some of my ramblings with details cut out) that you think would interest the Camp-Fire, fine and dandy.

Hoping you are O. K., I am—JAMES B. VERNON.

NOW, though there is of course no connection between the two cases, read this letter from a comrade who wants steps taken against a particular manifestation of the drug evil:

In the "Camp-Fire" I read the article written by X. Y. Z. who, as I understand, is connected with one of the organizations whose duty is to combat the drug devil in this country. I am a member of the Camp-Fire, though my voice has been silent for a long time I beg to be heard today, hoping thereby to help some others who, though they are willing to speak, yet are not permitted by circumstances over which they have no control.

MR. X. Y. Z. spoke of the unfortunate girl who was found in a rooming-house insane, a victim of marihuana or loco weed. We, or to express myself better, those who have come in contact with drug addicts know what dope does to a man or woman in a period of few months. The United States Government sends thousands of pedlers and addicts to Leavenworth, Atlanta, and McNeil's Island for punishment every year, but how in the name of God can the Government expect a man to refrain from the use of dope when he can have all that he desires just for the plucking right inside the prison walls? I am referring to loco weed or marihuana.

We know that the weed grows in abundance in the Middle Western States, and the Federal Penitentiary is at Leavenworth, Kansas. On the prison ball-grounds and all along the walls in the yard the weed is growing in abundance. The farmers wage bitter war against the loco weed as it kills their cattle, yet the Government with all its vast resources at command don't seem to care what it does to the men it confines behind sixty-foot walls to *reform*. All of the men do not die in prison, all of them are not confined there for the rest of their natural lives. Some day they come out to mix with the so-called society and how can we expect them to become law-abiding citizens when they are soaked with the craving for narcotics?

YES, I am an Ex. During my confinement I was fortunate to be employed in Cell house D. where all the men whose sentences are five years or more are confined. I had the privilege of being out of my cell at night while the rest of the men were locked in the cells. I passed by many cells where the reek of the loco weed came belching forth in clouds. The guards are well aware of the conditions yet don't seem to care a snap. I have several times heard the guards speak that No. So-and-So "is sure hitting the pipe tonight" and laugh.

Once in a while some inmate will go out of his head and attempt to kill his cell partner but he is thrown in the dungeon for a few days and then is ready to start over again.

Sometimes a two or three time loser is put in the same cell with a first offender, the days are monotonous and the evenings long, so, besides learning all sorts of things that will help him to come back quicker to that or some other institution, he will acquire the craving for the dope—at the Government's expense.

I am not asking you to publish this in "Camp-Fire," though you can, but I do hope that you will forward this to Mr. X. Y. Z. and that he may prevail on the powers that rule to spend a few dollars and stamp out the scourge in the penitentiary.

Do not publish my name, yet should X. Y. Z. want any additional information I am ready to give it to him.

I shall be in this city for another month. After that I expect to take a journey to foreign parts that will last for several years.

Hoping you will acknowledge my letter and that it may do some good in combating the dope traffic, I beg to remain—EX-CONVICT No. ——.

This comrade gave me his former number, his full name and address. It is one of the exceptional instances in which we're willing to print a letter not signed with the writer's name. His letter was written in February and by some chance got into our cache without my answering it personally and when I drew it out he had presumably long since started on his journey to foreign parts. A copy was sent to X. Y. Z. but at this writing there has not been time for a reply. Camp-Fire being an open forum, our publication of statements or opinions means merely that they are presented to stand the test of Camp-Fire's judgment, but personally I can see no motive for misstatement here.

Here we have an ex-convict joining, through Camp-Fire, with an officer of the law to combat an evil. He did not know the officer's name nor where he lived. They were at the time, as a matter of fact, thousands of miles apart. The officer in all probability did not even know of the ex-convict's existence until the latter's letter was forwarded through us. Yet these extremes come together through Camp-Fire and make common cause in the interests of society. In doing so they enlist at least the attention of the hundreds of thousands of other readers who gather at our Fire—in many instances what they enlist will be considerably more than mere attention. What the final results will be no one can foretell nor measure in the event.

NOW consider this case and the unconnected one of comrades Young and Vernon.

Sometimes I wonder whether any of us, myself very much included, understand just what manner of thing we have built up among us—just how big and far-reaching, how intricate and many sided, is this unorganized organization that has grown into being during our sixteen years of common interests. Much, of course, is entirely obvious. There is the definite machinery of "Ask Adventure" for getting us reliable information when we need it. "Lost Trails" has found many a lost relative or friend—not to mention the times when our Identification Cards locate them dead and unknown. When no agency anywhere can give us some fact or clue we appeal to Camp-Fire at large, and how often have we failed to get an answer? But all these are visible workings plain to all. They are not in themselves the things that make me wonder.

WHAT tantalize are the stray glimpses that can't even be put into definite words, the seemingly isolated instances, like this case of comrades Young and Vernon, that at first glance have no general significance, or the fairy-slender grape-vines threading out through all the world, apparently going nowhere, leading to nothing, yet always going somewhere and so often leading to unexpected goals. Sometimes bringing back strange matters with strange results—news of a coming war before the newspapers have gleamed even a hint of hostility; some tiny thing a museum welcomes joyfully; a homely incident half across the world; the first needed report of a foreign warship's being where it should not be; a touch of philosophy; a king as a tramp, a famous poet as a ship's apprentice boy abused into desertion because he wouldn't write poetry, a hunted convict and deserter teaching a teacherless school in the jungle (a host of things like these); two strangers made friends across a thousand miles; an idea leaping from one continent to another, arriving unobserved; Alaska, Chili, Rhodesia, Tibet suddenly connected on some hair-line. You see, it doesn't mean anything you can lay your hands on, but doesn't it tantalize with a suggestion of things we can't quite vision?

Sometimes I think I'm getting a real clue, as the other day when it became so clear that "Bob" Gordon and our "Old Songs" department are gathering folk-song treasures that all the colleges and collectors in the country haven't been able to dig out of the people. For while he "knows his stuff," "Bob" Gordon is "just folks" himself, by choice, and is as thoroughly imbued with the Camp-Fire spirit as any one of the lot of us. And on this long collecting expedition of his he finds himself part of this intangible thing we've builded, of a something that seems to include along with him the people who know these songs and the people who all along his way rise up to guide, suggest, cooperate—the rest of us, too, who read some of his treasure-troves month by month as he sends them in. This seems a better clue than usual to the tantalizing thing that lies unseen beyond the obvious. But it gets me nowhere, which is just where I was when I began talking.

CAMP-FIRE, by long established custom, is not a place for singing the praises of our own writers and stories. Even praise of them in a reader's letter is cut out before the letter appears in print. Our writers meet with us about the blaze and are expected to tell us something about the material from which their stories are made and when they first join us they stand up to introduce themselves. But as time slips by there come more and more new readers who were not on hand when the introductions were made and we want them to feel just as acquainted all around as the older comrades.

So why not, in each issue at the end of "Camp-Fire," have the facts about one of our writers' brigade? We'll start with one who is getting to be almost as well known outside our family circle as he is within it:

BACK in February, 1922, Larry Barretto, who was then on our editorial staff, and hadn't yet written any of his three books, was reading what we call the unrush. The unrush are those thousands of manuscripts that come from writers unknown to us and from writers who, though known to us, have not as yet sold us a story. The name doesn't mean what it says, for the MSS. are handled as quickly as are those others we call the rush, and, unlike most magazines, we do not consider them meat for the greenest members of the staff.

Barretto finished the MSS. and exploded. He'd found not only a story that was usable but one he was quite mad about. It could have been bought on his O. K. and mine but he wanted all the others to read it. He'd "found" a brand new writer, a fellow no one had ever heard of—the man's first story. The others read and joined in the enthusiasm. It reached me last of all, and—I'd rather not confess it—I liked it too but its style seemed to me artificial. It was a war story and its point of view and method of telling didn't seem quite to fit the material. I had not served in the A. E. F. But Barretto had. He and the others swept my objections away.

The story was called "The Patrol" and it was by a fellow named Leonard H. Nason, out in Chicago. We've been buying his stories ever since, though recently the *Saturday Evening Post* and others have followed suit, he has published practically nothing in any magazine but ours. Wherever else he may appear at times, "Steamer" stays in our writers' brigade and answers to his name at Camp-Fire.

THOUGH now in civilian life and though some inside bits of him were left in France, he is incurably a soldier at heart—and incurably the biographer of the enlisted men of the A. E. F. The best witnesses to his success as portrayer of actual life, thought and expression in the ranks, are the thousands who were themselves in those ranks. We have yet to hear from one who is not an enthusiastic endorser. One of them is Laurence Stallings, author of "What Price Glory." The following is from his column in the New York *World:*

"His stories are saturated with the feelings of the private soldier . . . should serve throughout time as faithful reproductions of the Yank speech . . . His work is worthy of the library shelf. . . . Mr. Nason's psychology is as good as his dialog and the soldier's outlook is reproduced with great fidelity. . . . All members of the late A. E. F. will know them for one helluva good job, O. D. Mark 1, Complete."

MR. NASON was born September 28, 1895, in Somerville, Mass., and later moved to Auburndale. He began his adventuring at seventeen in the West Indies and took a few cruises on windjammers and tramp steamers around Gulf ports.

In 1914 he began entering Norwich University at Northfields, Vermont, but the Mexican mobilization found him in the Headquarters Company of the 1st Vermont Infantry. Entered Norwich University again but the World War interrupted him and he enlisted in the 18th U. S. Cavalry, which later became the 76th Field Artillery. He served overseas with them as liaison sergeant, at Château-Thierry, St. Mihiel and the Argonne.

In July he was wounded at Mont St. Pere and again in October at Montfaucon—in hospital until Christmas, 1918. Those of you who read "A Pair of Breeches" were reading very largely his own personal experiences, and will remember that no one expected him to leave the hospital in a vertical position—that is, no one but himself.

Even when he sailed for home on the *U. S. S. Northern Pacific* his A. E. F. adventures were not over, for you may remember that that ship was wrecked on Fire Island, a few miles from New York, New Year's Day, 1919. However, despite his recent hospital sojourn, he came through all right, was discharged from the Army, entered Norwich University for the third time, and no other wars interrupting, was graduated in 1920.

In that same year he married Lucia Millet of Boston, and two children have raised the Nason family roster to four. For two years he worked as claim adjuster for the Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, in Boston and Chicago. It was during this period that his first story came to us and presently there arose the question of whether he should burn his insurance business behind him and try to keep the wolf from the door by giving all his time to fiction. Ten years earlier I could have told any writer whether or not he was warranted in such an attempt, but I'd become more intelligent by that time and ventured no answers to such a question unless very sure of my ground. In this case all of us in the office were entirely sure. He would have taken the step eventually in any case, but we backed him up in deciding to do it at once.

HE DOESN'T write his war stories from an easy chair and his own notes and recollections alone. He is always gathering fresh material, by mail and in person, from those who have the real thing. In June he returned from two years in Europe—with Biarritz as a base he was going over the battlefields. In July he wrote, "I am at present at Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont, playing soldier, but I'm going home in another week and will finish my *Sheehan* yarn. This outfit I am with here are all old soldiers and I have secured enough dope to last me for years to come." He talks, thinks, breathes, loves and lives his subject—he is the born historian, the born portrayer of one phase of America's history.

One of his was included in the volume, "*Adventure's* Best Stories—1926," George H. Doran Company, among the eighteen short stories chosen from the thousands published by our magazine during its fifteen years. His "Chevrons," recently published as a serial in our pages, has just been issued in book form by the same publishing house.—A. S. H.

Ask

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

General Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere

STRAIGHT

A News Bulletin of Outdoor Equipment

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World

Trapping

MUSKRATS are plentiful in Michigan, but so are trappers. Here are some suggestions on the best methods of winning out in spite of the heavy competition.

Request:—"Wish to know if we can trap muskrats in Lake Co., Mich., this coming season. If so, any other information would be appreciated."—CLARK E. KELLER, Lake Villa, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Thompson:—The best place I know for you to trap in Michigan is at Shingleton, on Lake Superior. At that you are going to find a great many competitors, and I would go early and look the grounds over, at least a month or so in advance of the open season. At that you may rest assured that you are not going to make big catches as there are too many in the game, and you can not tell whether fur has moved from there or not since summer when I was there. You might find a cabin as there are some which are vacant and you can use. One ten by twelve or twelve by fourteen will be large enough. You will certainly most of the time use snow shoes, and shoepacks are the best footwear you can use for general going.

A hundred traps would be a big outfit. You ought to get along with fifty. And if you are a good hand at making deadfalls you will get along like a regular trapper with a heap less to pack in. All depends on how large a territory you will cover.

Brazil

ONE could scarcely imagine a more interesting territory in which to explore, and take motion pictures than the remote parts of Brazil. But there are difficulties.

Request:—"There are four of us, good men contemplating on making a trip by boat from here to the most remote parts of S. America, for the purpose of getting a few thousand feet of film, and entirely out of the ordinary taking picture of the jungle life, including practically every tribe of Indians there and the life.

1. How hazardous a trip do you think it would materialize to be?

2. Estimate the expense for four, including

Adventure

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Verdicts by Experts on the Authenticity of Current Non-Fiction

GOODS

and Commodities Tested by Our Experts

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

Collecting and Discussing Old Songs still Living among the People

equipment? We intend to stay two years if necessary, also what equipment would we need?

3. Are there any places that have not been explored by white men down there in Brazil? If so what part?"—A. C. WILCOX.

Reply, by Mr. Paul Shaw:—In regard to your letter about a trip to the Jungle of Brazil, may I say the trip would be fairly hazardous to a group of four Americans no matter how hardy and experienced they are in jungle life. There are various obstacles which would confront you.

First, we might put the climate and the insects and the animals of the tropics which might endanger your health.

Second, the inaccessibility of the remote sections both from the view point of transportation and communication with the outside world. Furthermore, there are no adequate and detailed maps of this jungle district, so that you would be really at a loss to know where you were. In many districts the Indians have never seen a white man and even when they have seen him they look upon him as an intruder and you may have a great deal of trouble with native tribes. It would be very difficult to get Brazilian guides to accompany you and it would be necessary for you to speak Portuguese in order to use these guides and you should also have elementary knowledge of Indian dialects.

As to the expense in the jungle itself, you would have to travel by bartering with Indians. You would have to obtain most of your food by use of the rod and the gun and you would have to carry your own salt and equipment from the coast. I should think that the main bulk of the expense would be getting to and from Brazil, which for four persons a round trip would be around fifteen hundred dollars. I should have, if I were going, at least two thousand dollars more in reserve.

THERE are certain places that have not been explored by white men. They are in the headwaters of the tributaries of the Amazon. Most of that district has very largely been photographed by Walter Hinton of the Hamilton-Rice Expedition. Personally, I should advise you to get a very good command of Portuguese and to make friends of some outstanding Brazilian before I attempted a journey of this sort and then to work with this Brazilian, who might be able to accompany you.

Shoulder Holsters

A DOUBTFUL point of historical fact in a recent motion picture evokes some interesting—and expert—comment on the origin of one method of carrying hand guns.

Request:—"I am writing to you regarding the history of the spring shoulder holster and the period it came into use.

In a recent motion picture one character who took the part of a gambler and pony express rider carried two cap-and-ball Colts in spring holsters under each arm. I think that the guns were of .36 caliber although it showed only one close view of the guns and holsters.

After I saw the picture I began to wonder about those holsters, and whether spring holsters were used in 1850-60. Mainly because this person wore them tied down around his waist with what looked like a piece of modern sash-cord. Has the credit for the spring invention been given to any certain person?

Now for one more question and then I won't bother you any more.

How should an ordinary shoulder holster be worn? Completely under the armpit or around on the left breast? I wear mine (about once a year) like this: as far down as possible with the muzzle end tied to my belt, the upper part is slewed around front as far as possible setting the gun at an angle. The breast strap is fastened under the butt of the gun thus making the whole holster rigid. Is this right? Should the gun be lifted straight up in drawing or jerked out?

If this should be used in *Adventure* please don't use my name."—F. W. M., Baxter Springs, Ark.

Reply, by Mr. Wiggins:—I believe the shoulder holster in its original form, that of the plain pouch or bucket, similar to a belt holster, dates to the seventies or eighties, and the genius of the late John Wesley Hardin, the Texan. See recent files of *Collier's* weekly for a history of him, which was entitled "The Preacher's Bad Boy," and gave a history of his life. I believe that he is credited with the invention of this holster in the seventies or eighties, as he was known to draw and kill men who had him covered, beating them to it.

But I believe the holster now used so widely—yes, I have two of them on my .45s, one Hardy and one Furstnow—date to the present century and were originated by Al Furstnow, of Miles City, Montana. At least, I saw his output the first of any. Personally, I prefer the Hardy to any.

Like you, I saw that film, and the shoulder spring holsters were the worst feature there. I've seen many of the old cap-and-ball Colts in the holsters where they rode to, in, and from the wars of the past century, and have yet to see other than a belt holster. Some men in those days carried short guns, Colts or Derringers, in pockets, but I believe that they made a ball-up when they made the movie actor carry his guns the way he did. Yes, I believe they were the five-shot .36 Navy Colts.

As regards wearing the shoulder spring holster, I wear mine swung under the armpit, butt of gun rather low and inclined toward the front; slap the hand over butt, thrusting it downward and as it clears the tension of the spring, jerk it toward the front, and throw it toward the mark you wish to hit. That's my method, faulty though it may be.

I never tie down a shoulder holster, either. Practically every peace officer here uses the shoulder holster, and I can't recall of one who ever tied down the lower end of it. Let 'em ride free, wide and handy, is the plan here.

The pouch holster, the conventional old type, is very secure and it's seldom a gun falls from it, while the chances of a fall from any but a Hardy shoulder spring quick-draw holster must be taken into consideration always, I believe. I never had my heavy .45 Smith & Wessons or the Colt fall out of that Hardy holster, however, and regard it as the king-pin of them all.

All in all, while I believe the actor was mixed up in the date of the shoulder holster, I believe he did excellent work, although I must say that a man who loafed about with his hands on his guns that way would have been very likely to encounter a sawed-off shotgun in the hands of some officer ere he got far. As regards the more historically interesting parts, the film is good. But I've got to say the movie gunfighters pull some gosh-awful stunts.

Our Question and Answer service is free but our experts can not reply to queries that are not accompanied by stamped envelope.

Samoa

EVEN better than it was in the days of Robert Louis Stevenson! It is one of the healthiest of the South Sea groups and—as an indirect result of the war—there is a better chance for white men.

Request:—"I would like to know what chances a young fellow with the limited amount of $2000 cash, would have in Samoa, were he to make a start in vanilla raising, etc.?

How high is land per acre? Are these islands healthful?

Altogether is there much opportunity there for a young fellow?

I've read so much of R. L. Stevenson that I'm dying to get away from the mad rush of American industry and seek a fairer clime, so that's why I'll be eagerly awaiting your reply."—JOS BALDWIN, Niagara, Wis.

Reply, by Mr. Mills:—Samoa has greatly improved since Robert Louis Stevenson's day. There is a better chance for white men to get on there since New Zealand took over the mandate from the Germans, by right of conquest and more humane government. With the amount of cash you have available you should certainly be able to make good. I can not give you the price of land you may be able to lease, but can assure you that the Samoan Group is a healthy area—one of the healthiest in this end of the South Seas. Before you venture over there I would advise you to write to the High Commissioner, Apia, Samoa, and ask him if you can buy or lease a bit of land for vanilla or other produce. Ask him for price and other details. You will get a prompt and courteous reply. Then you have your own bit of American Samoa. Write to the Samoan Department, Washington, for particulars.

Saigon

NOT a good city to hide in, but nevertheless an excellent place for one who can speak the French language, wear pongee silks and enjoy zoological gardens

Request:—"I am working on a play part of which is laid in Saigon and I wonder if you could refer me to a book from which I could get a pictorial idea of the place? I want to know particularly the habits of life among the foreign colony, what are their most usual pursuits and how do they live from day to day? Also what are the hotels like? You will readily see that I am looking more or less for atmosphere. If there is no book of the sort about the place, perhaps you know of a novel or short story from which I could get such things.

If it seems strange to you that any one should attempt to locate a scene in a place he knows nothing about, I'll confide that the only reason I picked on Saigon is because it is a good name, not well-known and still on a boat line. It seemed like a good place for a chap to go if he didn't want to be found easily."—Grover Theis, New York City.

Reply, by Mr. MacCreagh:—Who told you that Saigon was not a well-known place? You hint that your character would be wanting a place where he could not be very easily found. Why, Saigon is very excellently policed and registered according to the French system. Arrivals and departures—even though only into the interior—are carefully recorded, with all the officiousness that the French display in their colonies. The secret police are in constant touch with all the chief capitals of the world; and everybody's business is known to the authorities—and nearly everybody else.

There are about a thousand white residents—civilians. And some thousand troops stationed in or around.

It is rather a large order to describe the social life if you do not know anything about life in an Asio-European city. If you do, there is nothing to describe. The life is exactly as it is in any other and similar city. Briefly, club life, with much dining out and giving dinners. There is a race track, and people play tennis. They dress mostly in pongee silks or white ducks. They lounge a lot and drink a lot—liqueurs mostly.

Do you read French? If so, there are several books which would give you atmosphere. I know of none in English.

"Vignt Annees en Saigon," by Aimee Ducrois.
"L'Indo Chine Francaisse," by J. deLanessan.
"Les Rivages Indo Chinois," by R. Castex.

I am sorry I can't give you the names of the publishers. But perhaps the library might have some dope you could use.

I might add for the benefit of your fugitive that there are excellent parks and a zoological garden where one can make dates.

You can describe it as a nice clean city. Avenues of trees. But migosh, I'd hate to attempt to describe in a play any place I didn't know.

Our experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. Make questions definite. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (See next section.)*—Beriah Brown, Coupeville, Wash.

The Sea Part 2 *British waters. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.*—Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 3 *Statistics of American Shipping. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.*—Harry E. Rieseberg, Apartment 347-A Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C.

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Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (See next section.)—Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

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Malaysia, Sumatra and Java (*Editor to be appointed.*)

★ **New Guinea** *Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. Armit, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia.

Philippine Islands *History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.*—Buck Connor, L. B. 4., Quartzsite, Ariz.

Hawaiian Islands and China (*Editor to be appointed.*)

Japan (*Editor to be appointed.*)

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★ **Asia Part 4** *North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting.*—George W. Twomey, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China.

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Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland (*Editor to be appointed.*)

✠ **Great Britain** *General information.*—Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England.

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✠ **Canada Part 2** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel.*—Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

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Canada Part 9 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic. General questions on this territory, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere. Also Royal Canadian Mounted Police.*—PATRICK LEE, Tudor Hall, Elmhurst, Long Island.

Alaska *Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.*—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 5647 Lexington Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

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Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville. (Editor to be appointed.)*

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Eastern U. S. Part 7 *Eastern Maine. For all territory* east *of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.*—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 8 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions, history.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 108 Hobart St., New Haven, Conn.

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Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

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Army Matters, United States and Foreign Lieut. Glenn R. Townsend, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning Naval and maritime affairs.*—Lieut. Francis Greene, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

State Police Francis H. Bent, Jr., care *Adventure.*

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Stamps H. A. Davis, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins Howland Wood, The American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; questions of horses of the old and new West.*—Thomas H. Dameron, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Motor Boating George W. Sutton, 6 East 45th St., New York City.

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Track Jackson Scholz, 73 Farmington Ave., Long Meadow, Mass.

Skating Frank Schreiber, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

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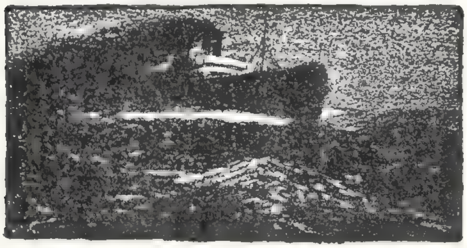
Tennis *Results, style of play, history, etc. Questions as to rules will not be answered.*—Fred Hawthorne, Sports Dept., New York Herald Tribune, New York City.

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World



IT IS the intention not only to build up a world-wide association of travelers but to establish, for their convenience, pleasure and practical help a carefully planned organization that will unite in the common interests of travelers and travel all factors concerned therein and that will give the Association its own Stations, all over the globe, for their convenience and information en route. *Adventure* has maintained its own Stations for years and arrangements are now under way to add hundreds more to the two hundred and eighty in existence at this writing in early August.

Adventure's policy has always been to take its readers into friendly confidence on future plans, to get their advice in shaping these plans and their active cooperation in turning the plans into accomplishment.

In this case we in the office are particularly open to suggestions from any of you on the basis of the general outline given above. But even that bare outline sounds grandiose and perhaps, to some, too ambitious, so that until we have the foundations firmly built we'd rather not outline the plan in more detail. Membership in Adventure's Travel Association is going to be made extremely worth while, but until we have in hand the solid proofs of that statement we'll make no specific claims.

Our other Service Departments—"Books You Can Believe," "Straight Goods" and the "Questions and Answers" section of "Ask Adventure"—will of course cooperate fully with the A. T. A.

As you will see at a glance, these few services combine into one great big machine or organization that gives our readers mastery over everything whatever that pertains to travel, covering the ground from your own library to the earth's farthest corners. Where, when, how to go, what to take, what to wear, what to bring home, where and how to get information on any place both from books and from some one who knows that place from first-hand experience. All over the world it will give you people to whom you can turn for local guidance and information. If you can think of anything else A. T. A. and "Ask Adventure" in general can do for the traveler, or for those interested in any phase of outdoor activity, tell us about it.

The list of already existing Stations follows:

- **Arizona**—200—Clifton. C. Hooker.
  - 209—Quartzite. Buck Conner, Box 4.
  - 285—Yuma. W. P. Kline, 4th Ave. & 8th St.
  - 332—Buckeye. R. L. Harvey.
- **Arkansas**—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 322 Morrison Ave.
- **California**—28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, Cottage Inn.
  - 60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse. Hotel St. Augustine.
  - 73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
  - 74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
  - 89—Chico. K. W. Mason, 1428 Park Ave.
  - 108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
  - 113—Vallejo. Edith G. Engesser, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
  - 114—Mill Valley. L. F. Guedet, Restawhyle Knoll.
  - 115—Los Gatos. G. H. Johnson.
  - 116—Sebastopol. Mrs. Lucy E. Hicks, 420 S. Main St.
  - 126—Covelo. Whit H. Ham, Box 388.
  - 141—Santa Cruz. A. W. Wyatt, Capitola Road and Jose Ave.
  - 149—San Francisco. A. H. Hutchinson, Veteran Press, 1264 Valencia St.
  - 186—Santa Ysabel. William Strover, Santa Ysabel Inn.
  - 210—Berkeley. Dr. Louis C. Mullikin, 305 Acheson Bldg.
  - 211—Pomona. Fred G. Sunley, 480 E. Alvarado St.
  - 212—Del Monte. Alex H. Sokoloff, 3rd Signal Co. R. O. T. C.
  - 231—San Francisco. Earl V. Swift, 24-A Brady St.
  - 251—Williams. Joe Lanouette, Opera Pool Hall.
  - 252—Fresno. Mrs. Harriet Church, Echo Gardens, 712 Echo Ave.
  - 257—San Francisco. K. F. Richards, 1807 Post St.
  - 266—Santa Barbara. E. Chester Roberts, 714 State St.
  - 273—Los Angeles. Henry M. Harrod, 6615 So. Main St.
  - 286—Sacramento. Carl W. La Force, 2329 Eye St.
  - 287—Stockton. Ivan J. Dill, 727 E. Church St., P. O. Box 700.
  - 298—La Mesa. Alan Wanbough, 343 Spring Street.
  - 310—Cajon Pass. Richard Hall, Hall's Auto Camp.
  - 313—San Diego. Frank H. Huston, 2966 California St.
  - 321—Banning. William Daustin, P. O. Box 36.
  - 325—Lodi. S. J. Duffield, Imperial Hotel.
  - 331—Los Angeles. E. Amos Pyle, 4360 Cheney St.
  - 334—Hollywood. Edw. E. Mallin, P. O. Drawer F-1.
- **Colorado**—105—Grand Junction. Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.
  - 267—Sugar Loaf, Boulder County. Frank Earnest.
  - 279—Denver. Louis D. Coleman, 3250 High St.
- **Connecticut**—142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.
  - 343—New Haven. Jesse E. Squires, 371 Derby Ave.
- **Delaware**—335—Delmar. J. A. Aniba, 107 E. East St.
- **D.C.**—167—Washington. Walter A. Sheil, 503 Sixth St. N. E.
- **Florida**—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 49 N. E. First St.
  - 117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.
  - 128—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.
  - 138—St. Petersburg. Miss Maude V. Hughson, 2402 First Ave., So.
  - 139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
  - 143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St., N.
  - 188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.
  - 258—Jacksonville. T. J. Eppes, The Hobby Shop.
  - 262—Wildwood. E. M. Dilly, L. B. 114.
  - 285—Tampa. R. Stuart Murray, Mezzanine Floor, Hillsboro Hotel.
  - 288—Orlando. O. D. Young, 112 Court St.
  - 318—Chipley. Jack H. Shivers, P. O. Box 53, Along the Old Spanish Trail.
  - 322—New Pomona. Ed. N. Clark. Putnam District Progress.
  - 349—Ortega. Albert A. Porta, Box W.
- **Georgia**—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald*.
  - 289—Monticello. O. E. Wells.
- **Idaho**—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.
- **Illinois**—66—Chester. Capt. W. B. Barter.
  - 67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
  - 189—Chicago. Herman A. Schell, 8708 Vincennes Ave.
  - 213—Chicago. Pietro Ferraro, 1007 S. Peoria St.
  - 237—Chicago. Wm. Churchill, 6541 S. State St.
  - 253—Chicago. G. C. Huebner, 2608 Magnolia Ave.
  - 290—Gibson City. J. D. Ashley, 117 Sangamon Ave.
  - 303—Chicago. Leslie C. Marshall, 9155 Normal Blvd.
  - 312—Paxton. Oscar Olson.
  - 328—Rantoul, Champaign Co., Jos. J., and Clarence Watson, R. F. D. No. 3 Box 41.
  - 345—Villa Park. Eugene F. Huson, 602 Riverside Drive.
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  - 90—Linton. Herschell Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.
  - 180—Warsaw. Homer Lewis.
  - 287—Vincennes. John C. Maloney, 1004 N. Seventh St.
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- **Kentucky**—144—Corbin. Keith Mauney.
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- **Louisiana**—140—New Orleans. J. D. Montgomery, Navy Recruiting Office.
  - 228—St. Rose. C. M. Elfer.
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  - 59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.
  - 111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.
  - 243—Winthrop. O. A. Abbot.
  - 320—East Sullivan. H. B. Stanwood.
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  - 82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
  - 151—Westminster. L. J. Schaefer, 167 E. Greene St.
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  - 96—Medford. Frederick I. LeBuff, 29 Garfield Ave.
  - 274—Everett. Aubrey S. McLellan, 4 Marion Place.
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  - 106—Lansing. S. N. Cook, 2400 Sterling Ave.
  - 131—Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsythia, R. F. D. No. 3.
  - 137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
  - 192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
- **Minnesota**—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
  - 145—St. Cloud. F. T. Tracy, 502 6th Ave., South.
  - 299—Minneapolis. Russell Hearne, 411 First Ave., N.
  - 311—Canby. Joe Millard, Minnesota State Fair.

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289—Nevada. T. St. Hope, 705 N. Clay St.
333—St. Louis. Geo. Georgevits, 4442 Morganford Road.
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254—Hamilton. Mrs. Lucy Hyde, 64 N. Second St.
288—Anaconda. R. T. Newman.
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214—Tecumseh. Dr. C. F. Roh.
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319—Claremont. Frank H. Moose, Box 25.
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164—Chatham. Roy S. Tinney.
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245—Corbin City. Lee Roberts.
260—Camden. Benj. P. Thomas, 2791 Constitution Rd.
269—South Orange. Eugene Connett, 170 Turrel Ave.
275—Camden. Captain Herbert George Sparrow, Ship No. 1269 Naval Post. Veterans of Foreign Wars, Armory of Second Battalion, Naval Militia of New Jersey, Temple Theater Building, 415 Market St.
314—Jersey City. C. Dieze, Follansbee's Rest, Inc.
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290—Santa Fé. Ralph E. Pierson.
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23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
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185—Brooklyn. J. M. Canavan, 69 Bond St.
193—Niagara Falls. Roy Tompkins, 1155 Garret Ave.
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348—Narooma, S. Coast, New South Wales. John E. Grant.

Belgium—131—Antwerp. Reuben S. James, Place de l'Entrepot 3.

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  - 22—Burlington, Ontario. T. M. Waumsly, Jocelyn Bookstore.
  - 29—Deseronto, Ontario. Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly*.
  - 30—Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, The Carleton Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue.
  - 31—Howe Sound, B. C. C. Plowden, Plowden Bay.
  - 44—Winnipeg, Manitoba. E. Ellis, 36 Hart Ave., Elmwood.
  - 45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 84 La Riviere St.
  - 62—Woodstock, Ontario. George L. Catton, 94 Metcalfe St.
  - 84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
  - 85—Oshawa, Ontario. J. Worral, 6½ King St. E.
  - 102—Amherst, Nova Scotia. Lloyd E. MacPherson, 5 Belmont St.
  - 124—Hartshorn, Alberta. Leonard Brown, 33-34-17 W4M.
  - 178—Moncton, N. B. Chas. H. McCall, 178 St. George St.
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  - 272—Honolulu, Hawaii. Hubert T. Miller, Room 4, Silent Hotel.
- **Honduras, C. A.**—70—La Ceiba. Jos. Buckly Taylor.
- **India**—197—Calcutta. W. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.
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  - 327—U. S. S. *Cincinnati*. Lloyd W. Frech.
- **New Hebrides**—338—Santo. Raymond Purcell, Turtle Bay.
- **Newfoundland**—132—St. John's. P. C. Mars, Smallwood Bldg.
- **Porto Rico**—46—Ensenda. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.
- **Philippine Islands**—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.
- **Virgin Islands**—301—St. Thomas. Joseph Reynolds, The Grand Hotel.

A News Bulletin *of Outdoor Equipment and Commodities*

STRAIGHT GOODS

TESTED BY OUR EXPERTS

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Books come to this office direct from the publishers and are sent by us to the experts in whose fields they fall. Books of little or no value will be reported as such to us but will be omitted from mention except in cases where a later popular vogue indicates the need of an authoritative verdict on their unreliablity. Even the best of books will be covered in few words.

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OUR SOUTHERN HIGHLANDERS, by Horace Kephart, Macmillan.—There was but one way for an outsider to write a really worth-while book having to do with the intimate lives and history of the Southern mountaineers, and Horace Kephart found that way. He went into the "back o' beyond" of the big hills himself, and lived among the mountaineers for years, not months, and came back with what is quite the most authoritative of the books of this kind that it has been this reviewer's lot to see.—HAPSBURG LIEBE.

MY FRIEND THE INDIAN, by James McLaughlin, Houghton Mifflin Company.—For the past sixteen years Mr. McLaughlin's book has been an accredited historical work among readers who have made a study of pioneer days in the West. To an ethnologist or a student of ethnology, Mr. McLaughlin's book may be a disappointment; but to the average reader seeking historical truths about the Indians, and particularly, the Dakotas from the stirring days of the '60s up to date, it will be distinctly worth while. It does contain some ethnological detail, but that detail is not emphasized. For thirty-eight years the author served in the Bureau of Indian Affairs as agent and inspector. He was in harness while he wrote.—ARTHUR WOODWARD.

THE OUTLINE OF RADIO, by John V. L. Hogan, past president of the Institute of Radio Engineers, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, Mass.—The book gives an intelligent and brief review of the historical development of radio, and from that proceeds to explain in a manner as non-technical as it is possible to do so the principles upon which radio operates. There are illustrations showing actual apparatus and circuits in lines with which many radio fans are now familiar. The book is recommended to the layman as an understandable treatise on the subject, and will be found valuable by engineers and others who wish to brush up on fundamentals.—DONALD MCNICOL.

Old SONGS that Men have Sung

Conducted by R. W. GORDON

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them. Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and if all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelope and sufficient reply postage (not attached). Write to Mr. R. W. Gordon direct (*not* to the magazine), care of Adventure, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

AN OLD broadside, one of a number that told how a lady dressed herself in man's attire and went with her sweetheart, comes to the department from Mr. S. C. Wheeler, of Lofall, Washington. It has little of the folk style, but was once a great favorite, and deserves to be preserved.

The *Lady LeRoy*

(Contributed by Mr. S. C. Wheeler.)

Bright Phoebe had risen
  And shone o'er the plains,
The birds were all singing,
  It was early one spring
When I spied a fair couple
  On old England's shore,
A viewing the seaside
  Where the billows doth roar.

The one was a lady,
  Both charming and fair,
And the other a captain
  Persuading his dear
To become his wife
  And companion ever more
And cross the wide ocean
  Where the billows doth roar.

Saying, "Your parents are great
  And angry with me.
If I stay in old England
  My ruin they'll be.
If I should have to leave you,
  'Twould grieve my heart sore
And cross the wide ocean
  Where the billows doth roar."

And the lady, being grieved,
  Hung down her head,
But at length she took courage
  And unto him said:
"I'll agree to go with you
  'Tis a heavy convoy
A good ship shall accompany
  The *Lady LeRoy*."

She dressed herself up
  In a suit of men's clothes,
And unto her old father
  Disguised she goes.
She purchased a vessel
  And she paid his demands—
Little did he think 'twas
  From his daughter's own hands.

She ventured, and unto
  Her lover did say:
"All is now ready,
  I pray there be no delay!"
They hoisted their topsails,
  And the colors did fly,
And over the ocean
  Sailed the *Lady LeRoy*.

But when her old father
  He came to understand,
He swore he'd have vengeance
  On this worthy young man.
He swore that his daughter
  Should never be his wife;
For her disobedience
  He'd end her sweet life.

He went to his captains
  In a raging despair,
Unto them the whole
  Of the story did declare,
Saying, "We will pursue them,
  Their lives we'll destroy!
For they ne'er shall escape
  On the *Lady LeRoy*!"

He begun the pursuit
  Without any delay.
They had not been sailing
  Past a week or ten days,
When they spied two ships sailing,
  Which filled them with joy;
They hailed them and found
  One was the *Lady LeRoy*.

He ordered them to go back
  To old England's shore
Or broadsides of grapeshot
  Into them he would pour.
Pretty Polly's true lover
  Made him this reply,
"Please send us a broadside
  For you we do defy!"

Broadside unto broadside
  Into each other they poured
Until the cannons on both sides
  Like thunder they roared.
Pretty Polly's true lover
  Gained the victory—
Then hurrah, my brave boys,
  For our sweet liberty!

"Go tell my old father
'Tis him I do defy
As long as my lover
Sails the *Lady LeRoy*."
She ordered him to go back
To old England's shore
Or broadsides of grapeshot
Into him she would pour.

They sailed to Boston,
To that city of fame
These two noble vessels
I will mention their names
The one was the *Essex*
And the other *LeRoy*
A health to Pretty Polly
The girl of my joy!

WHO can send me more "cumulative" songs like the following?

A Lullaby

(From Anderson Barnett, Australia.)

O in the ground there was a tree,
O the prettiest tree you did ever see!
O the tree in the ground
And the green grass growing all around!

O on that tree there was a limb,
The prettiest limb you did ever see!
O the limb on the tree
And the tree in the ground
And the green grass growing all around!

O on that limb there was a nest,
The prettiest nest you did ever see!
O the nest on the limb,
And the limb on the tree,
And the tree in the ground,
And the green grass growing all around!

O in that nest there was an egg,
The prettiest egg you did ever see!
O the egg in the nest,
And the nest on the limb,
And the limb on the tree,
And the tree in the ground,
And the green grass growing all around!

O in that egg there was a bird,
The prettiest bird you did ever see!
O the bird in the egg,
And the egg in the nest,
And the nest on the limb,
And the limb on the tree,
And the tree in the ground,
And the green grass growing all around!

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all questions concerning them, to R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Camp-Fire Buttons—To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

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Forwarding Mail—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: *Adventure* from 1919 to 1925, incomplete, totalling 112 issues, also November, 1918. What am I offered for the lot?—Address, B. DORAN, 3377 So. 17th Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

WILL SELL or EXCHANGE: Issues from 1920 to 1926, at 7c. each, plus postage. File incomplete, so will exchange.—Address, GEORGE J. CHAMPION, 1761 E. 39th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

WILL SELL: *Adventure* complete for 1922. Thirty-six copies, 10c each plus postage.—Address, J. PECARO, 505 W. 6th Street, St. Charles, Illinois.

FOR SALE: Complete file of *Adventure* from September 1, 1921, issue to date, 173 numbers. Best offer takes. F. o. b., Kansas City, Mo.—Address, W. S. GILMORE, 3231 Park Ave., Kansas City, Mo.

Identification Cards—Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

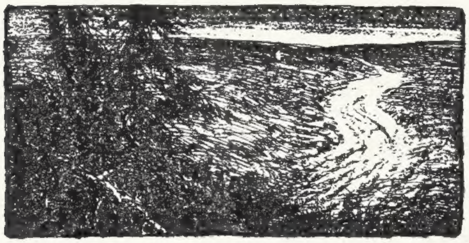
Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Camp-Fire Stations—Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding Stations to J. CASSIDY.

Lost Trails

We offer this service free of charge to readers who wish to get in touch with old friends from whom the years have separated them. All inquiries of this sort received by us, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with the inquirer's name. We reserve the right, in case the inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and in general to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name when possible. Give also your own full address. We will forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal Star *to give additional publicity in their "Missing Relative Column" weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to another are barred. Full lists of those unfound are reprinted semiannually.*



GILLMORE, James H. With the A. E. F. both in France and Siberia. Later in Co "H,' 31st Inf. in the Philippines. An old buddy would like to get in touch with him. Any information appreciated by "Two," care of *Adventure.*

JENSEN, SINAR. Last heard of in New Orleans a year ago. Your friends in Sarasota, Florida, would like to know your whereabouts. Address—A. KETELSEN, Box 1242, Sarasota, Florida.

SEELEY, JAMES HOWEY. Expert electrician. Your mother in a critical condition, not expected to live. It is her wish to see you before she goes. Also your children long for you. Any information gratefully received by sisters. Address—L. M. WOLFE, Lundale, W. Va., or MYRTLE SEELEY, 121 Jared Street, Du Bois, Pa.

PARKHURST, GUY. Formerly of Syracuse, New York. Last seen in New York City in 1920. Communicate with E. R. GUILD, Corregidor, Philippine Islands.

SEEGER, ADOLF. Last heard of from the Northern States in 1893, now he is 66 years old. I am his only sister, Emma Seeger. Was married to a Mr. Deibl, now dead. I am very anxious to get into communication with my brother. Address—MRS. EMMA DEIBL, care of Mr. Franz Hanisch, Empire Theater, Tientsin, China.

ROWBOTHAM, CYRIL K. Please write, Madge and Bob. Would like to hear from you, also Dad. Address—40 Wachasett Street, Mattapan, Massachusetts.

APPEL, MATT. J.—Height 5 ft. 9 ins., weighs about 150-155 pounds, dark brown hair, bald head, blue eyes, more information can be had by writing for same. Address—MRS. ANNA M. APPEL, Elmwood, Wisconsin, R. F. D. 2.

PARCE, FREMONT A. Age 66, six feet, gray or dyed black hair, possibly walks with a slight limp. Last heard from five years ago in Elgin, or Bend, Oregon, where he received mail. He received and answered one letter from Bend shortly before this and later inquiries from the postmaster there bring the answer that he never received mail at Bend. Foul play is feared. His only remaining son asks it. Address—RALPH RUSSELL PARCE, 624 So. 3rd Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

CALVERT, EARLE. Come home, all bills paid. Your family wants you back, you are forgiven. Francis is in high school, Robert in fourth grade. I am working at Touraine Hotel. We are getting along fine and I'll help and work with you. Put ad in *Adventure* for me, will always look for word from you. Send for us if you don't want to come back. We still love you and feel sorry for you. Address—MRS. LILLIAN CALVERT, Hotel Touraine, Room 620, Boston, Mass.

GIDEON, JAMES. If still living would be about 60 years of age. When a young man he was over six feet tall. Was last heard of near Bismarck, No. Dakota. It was thought that he left there for California. I would appreciate any information concerning him. Address—MRS. FAY R. BARTLEY, Box 110, Whitehall, Montana.

HAUSNER, STANISLAUS. Formerly top sergeant of the Aviation Division of Police Reserves of New York City. His folks live in Louisiana near the Gulf. He was a telegrapher for the Western Union in New York. Moving picture operator and interested in color and perspective moving pictures. About 28 years of age, Polish-American blond, about 5 ft. 8 ins. tall, 180 pounds. Last heard of care of a Bowen family, West 90th Street, New York City. Belonged to the motion picture operators' union. Write to SERGEANT EDWARD H. POLLACI, care of Police Reserve Aviation Unit, 156 Greenwich Street, New York City.

SKERRATT, FRED. I need you now, write me at once. Address—"TRAMP," care of *Adventure.*

VINCENT, DONALD. Left Montreal, Canada, August 4, 1916. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated by his mother. Address—MRS. H. VINCENT, 3144 Casetas Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

COOKE, WILLIAM. Once lived in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, 1916. His mother died in 1915. He is 35 years old, 5 ft. 6 ins. tall, sandy complexion, pockmarked on face and neck. I left Bill in Utah when war was declared and I enlisted in the army. Please write to me. Address—FRANK W. THOMAS, Box 128, Yorba Linda, California.

BERKOWITZ, MEYER. Last heard of in 1919. He arrived in Kansas City, Missouri, but never has been heard from since. He is twenty-two years of age, has gray eyes, light brown hair. Any information of his whereabouts would certainly be appreciated. Address—MISS SARAH BERKOWITZ, 2108 Holmes Avenue, Springfield, Illinois.

WOULD like to hear from some of my old comrades that I soldiered with in the Philippines on Panay. Heard from Major Benjamin A. Poor, who was captain in our time in the old 6th U. S. Inft. Also heard from Scotty Boice who at that time was an Inspector of Customs at San Francisco. Would love to hear from some of the old boys. Address—SERGEANT WILLIAM J. ROWLAND, 800 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

GRAY, KATHERINE and FRANK (brother and sister). Parents died and three children sent to Catholic Protectory, Westchester, N. Y. Separated about twenty years ago. Brother wishes information. Address—JAMES GRAY, Ausable Chasm, New York.

ANY relatives of John Edwards (son of Richard Edwards); any members of the 4th D. H. Q., C. F. C., B. E. F., France; Briston, Robert J.; Coonstack, Percy James; Daniel, Corsley; Eissengarthen, Guido; Henderson, Alpha Lloyd; Hoffman, Max; Holsall, Harry; Kellogg, Ernest D.; Kellogg, Clement; Kirk, William N.; Korte, W. F.; Lister, John; Locke, Arthur; Mann, G. B.; MacDonald, Bill; Nicol, John L.; O'Farrell, W. W.; Pallaye, Andrew J.; Parker, Lenniel Ernest; Pragan, James T.; Pray, W. H.; Reed, Mrs. Jack E.; Richie, Clarence and Harold; Scott, O. O.; Sharp, John Reuben; Smith, Dr. W. H.; Taylor, Edward; Thompson, Ross; Thompson, J. C.; O'Roke, John; Ward, Richard (Dick); Wilbur, John.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *November 8th*

Two *Complete Novelettes*·

The Wolf Pack

By Raymond S. Spears

Across the flats where the winds whirl stinging sand in a mad dance, up through the tortured barrenness of the Bad Lands, *Delos Conklin* followed his quarry, until at last he came to the secluded cabin of the girl *Pretty Shells*, high on the steep wooded slope of the Singing Bird Mountains.

Hanno's Sword

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

She chose her own master, did the proud sword *Gray Maiden*, and having chosen, served him well. Trapped in the enemy's country, brave men fight their way to freedom.

Two *Serials:*

The Way of Sinners

By F. R. Buckley

The second instalment of the serial beginning in this issue, in which young *Francesco* finds the bonds of marriage and the mercery business too tenuous for his adventurous spirit.

Part Two of Treasure

By Gordon Young

which begins in this issue, takes *Will Heddon* and the *Dragon* to sea with pursuit not far behind and a tropical squall coming up in the offing.

Also—*Good Short Stories*

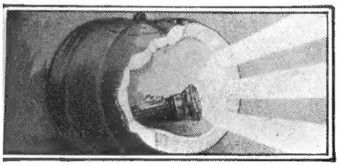
At Eliza's, *when would his son come back to him?* by W. Townend; Retreat, *an old man's quest,* by J. D. Newsom; Monotony, *a lively story of a dull place,* by Barry Scobee; Avicenna, *a noble Spaniard in a foreign land,* by Post Sargent; David, *an old weapon in young hands,* by Walter Farnham.

Adventure is out on the 8th and 23rd of each month

A THOUSAND THINGS MAY HAPPEN IN THE DARK

Eveready—*portable light in its most convenient form*

PUT an Eveready Flashlight in the jack-o'-lantern this Hallowe'en. It will burn brightly, without danger of fire. Nothing to spill, sputter or smoke. Many novel illuminating effects for parties can be obtained with Eveready Flashlights.



Put an Eveready Flashlight in the jack-o'-lantern

Wherever you need safe, bright, portable light—use an Eveready. In dark closets. Along dark hallways. In the bedrooms. In the garage. When motoring. Eveready is a silent sentinel of safety, ever ready to light the way. The finest flashlight money can buy.

Only Eveready has the new ring-hanger. To get *all* the newest and best flashlight features, insist upon a genuine Eveready. There's a type for every purpose and purse, and an Eveready dealer nearby.

* * *

Eveready Flashlight Batteries fit and improve all makes of flashlights. They insure brighter light and longer battery life. Keep an extra set on hand. Especially designed Eveready-Mazda Lamps, the bright eyes of the flashlights, likewise last longer.

Manufactured and guaranteed by
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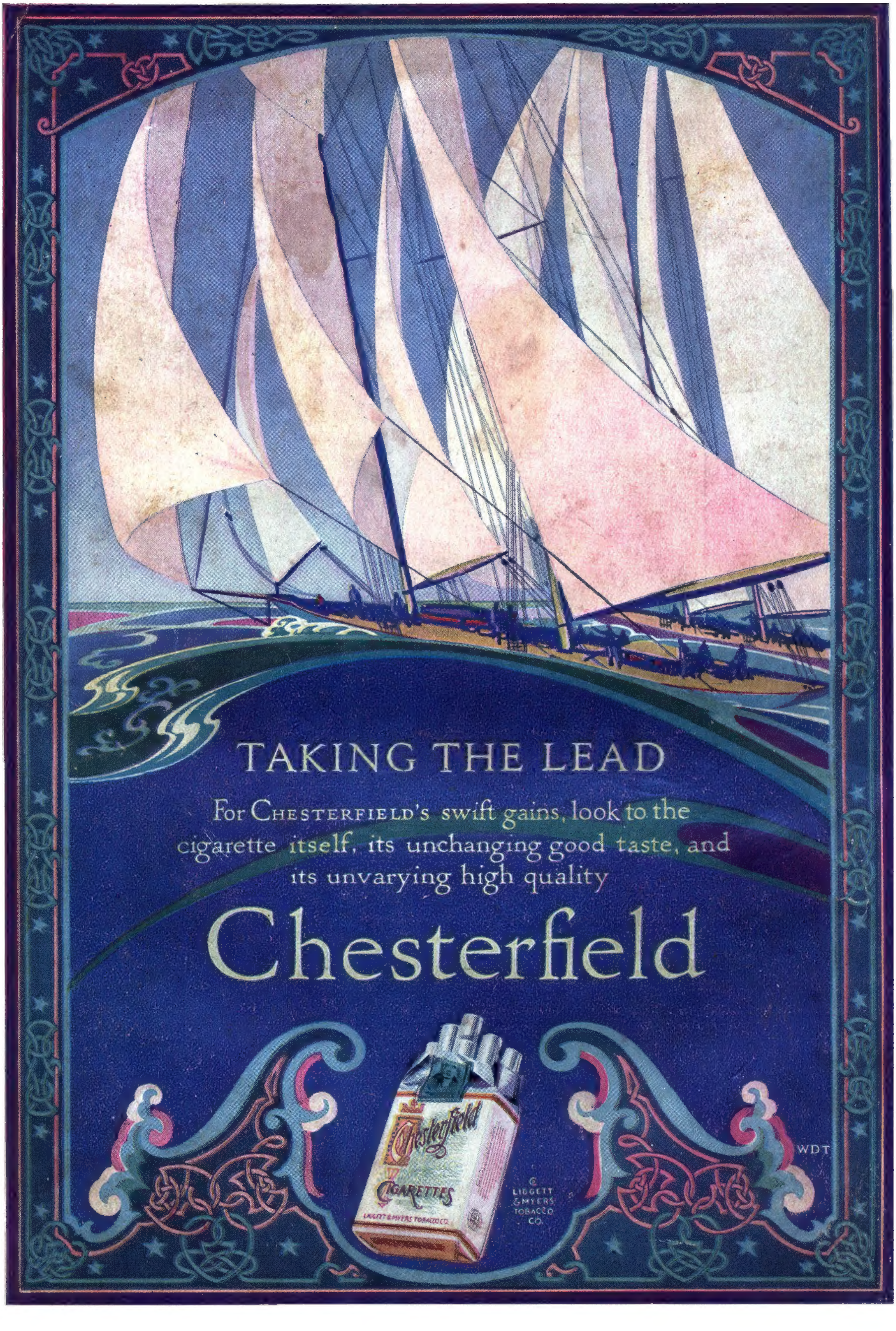
& BATTERIES
—they last longer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TAKING THE LEAD

For CHESTERFIELD'S swift gains, look to the cigarette itself, its unchanging good taste, and its unvarying high quality

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